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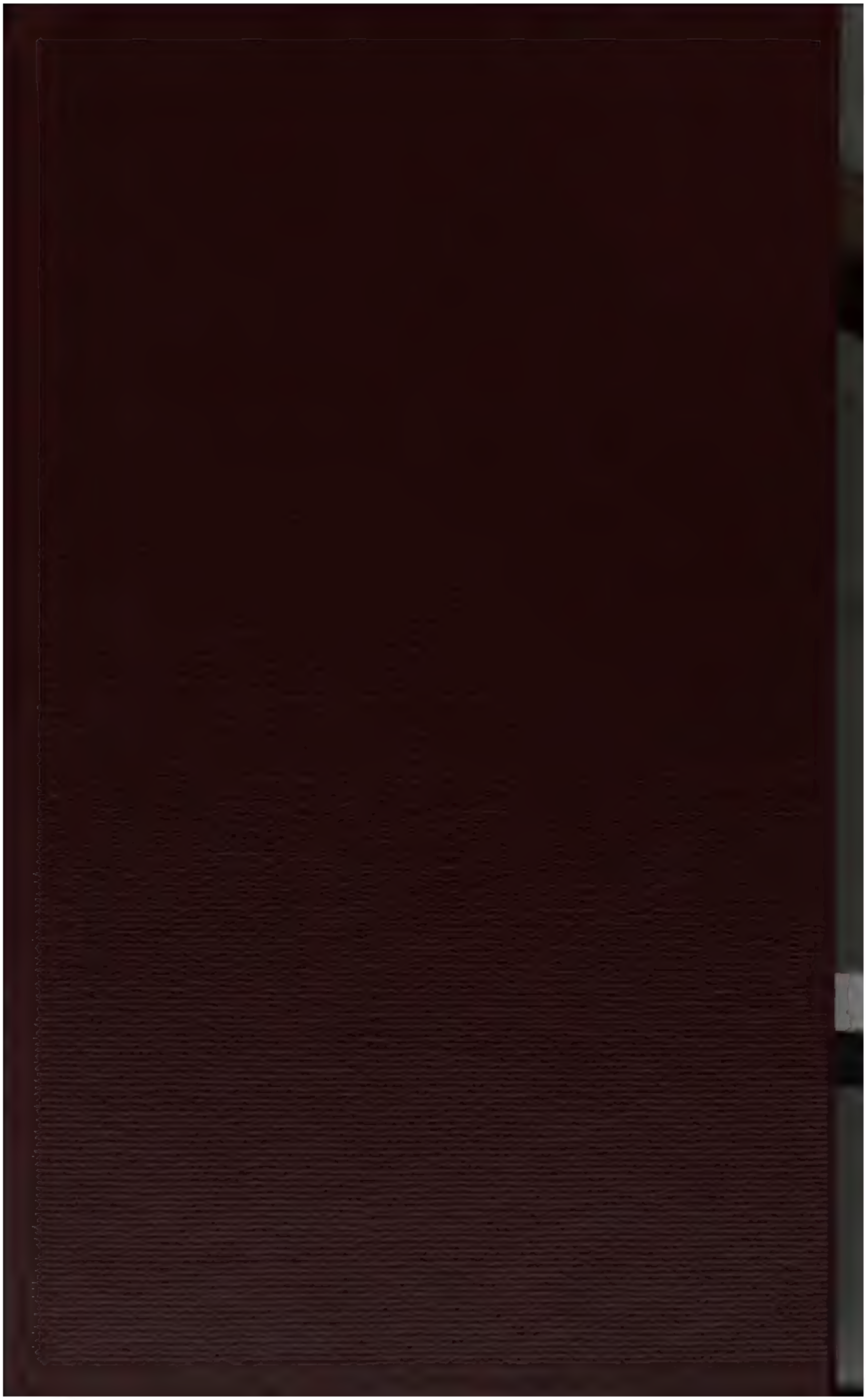

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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

OF

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND DUTY.

BY

NATHANAEL EMMONS, D.D.

LATE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN FRANKLIN, MASS.

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PREFACE.

THE pecuniary embarrassment which attended the business transactions of the country at the time when the works of Dr. Emmons were published, was deemed an insuperable objection to the multiplication or enlargement of the volumes beyond their present number and size. Intimation was then given that additional volumes might be issued at some future day, should circumstances favor the enterprise. It is in conformity with the earnest solicitation of many of the author's friends, and in connection with their generous co-operation, that the present volume is presented to the public. Though late in its appearance, it will not, it is believed, be found less interesting and valuable than those which have preceded it. Many of the sermons in this are upon topics embraced in the other volumes, but illustrated and applied in a different manner. There are others that are new, such as are not discussed in any of his preceding publications, and such as can be found in the sermons of few other divines. While in this, as in the preceding volumes, there will be seen the same clear illustrations of Christian doctrine, for which the author was so much distinguished, it will also be apparent to every attentive and pious reader, that he was no less remarkable for the discrimination and power with which he was accustomed to write and speak upon subjects of an experimental and practical character.

Former purchasers will find no difficulty in adding this volume to their set. It is printed with similar type, upon paper

of essentially the same quality, bound in a corresponding style, and where it is desired, numbered continuously with the preceding volumes. And should others be added, before a new edition of the work is issued, it is intended that their appearance shall correspond with their predecessors.

EDITOR.

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(Occasioned by the death of Rev. Samuel Spring, D. D., of Newburyport, March 4, 1819.)

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SERMON I.

SAINTS SET APART FOR GOD.

"But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself."—Psalm iv. 3.

Good men are deeply impressed with a sense of the wide distinction between saints and sinners. They look upon it as the greatest of all distinctions among men. And though the sacred writers mention worldly distinctions, yet they say much more about that essential distinction which God makes between the godly and ungodly. If you should read all the books in the world, you would not find this distinction so clearly and constantly mentioned, and so emphatically marked, by any uninspired writers. Nor do we find, in reading all the sacred books from Genesis to Job, so much said about this distinction, as in this book of Psalms. Here we find one continued contrast between the spirit and character of saints and sinners. David begins his book of devotion, with a description of the godly and the ungodly, and of their diverse views, feelings, and conduct through life, and of their final separation at the day of decision; and he never loses sight of these two characters through the whole of his writings. This indicates, that the distinction is very important and interesting. But he does not leave us to draw this conclusion merely from his mode of writing, but expressly calls upon us to attend to this essential distinction, which God has been pleased to make among the fallen race of Adam. "But *know* that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." This is not a mere declaration; but a command—*know* that the Lord hath made this distinction, however unwilling you may be to know and believe it. The plain and obvious meaning of the text may be comprised in this general observation:

It is important to be known, that God has set apart the godly from the rest of the world, for his own use.

I shall show,—

I. What is implied in God's setting apart the godly from the rest of the world.

II. That he has set them apart for his own use.

III. That this is of importance to be known.

I. Let us consider what is implied in the Lord's setting apart the godly from the rest of the world. Here it may be observed,

1. That this implies that God always intended to set them apart from the world. He never does anything but what he always intended to do. "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will;" and this counsel was formed from eternity. He must, therefore, have designed to set apart all the godly, whom he will finally set apart from the world, before the world began. Accordingly, the Bible represents all the godly as chosen to their character and condition from eternity. The doctrine of eternal election is clearly and abundantly taught by the sacred writers. It may be sufficient, however, to mention one passage in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be *holy* and without blame before him in love." The apostle here means to include all the godly from the beginning to the end of time. God knew exactly how many of the human race he should have occasion to employ in his service, and just so many he predestinated to bear his image, or to become godly, before he laid the foundation of the world. All these were set apart from the rest of mankind, in the divine purpose, from eternity. They were then chosen out of the world, or from the general mass of mankind, to be holy, useful, and happy forever.

2. God's setting apart the godly from the rest of the world implies that they were, before they were set apart, just like other men, *ungodly*. All men are by nature children of wrath, and dead in trespasses and sins. There is no moral difference between the elect and non-elect, before the elect become godly. If they were all by nature godly, there could be no occasion of God's setting apart one rather than another for himself. But since they are all by nature unholy and unfit for his service, he may see good reason to set apart some to be godly and fitted for his service. This leads me to observe,

3. That God's setting apart the godly from the rest of the world, implies that he gives them a heart after his own heart, or *makes them godly*. This is the general representation of scripture. The godly are the workmanship of God. He takes away their stony hearts, and gives them hearts of flesh. He translates them out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom

of his dear Son. They "are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "They are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath foreordained that they should walk in them." When God enstamps his moral image on the elect, and sheds abroad his love in their hearts, he makes them *godly*, and actually separates them from the world. From that time, they are crucified unto the world, and the world to them. They do in their feelings come out from the world, and take the part of God against the world. They feel as God feels, and pursue what God pursues. They choose to be on the Lord's side, and sincerely desire to promote his glory. I may add,

4. The Lord's setting apart the godly further implies his fixing their situations in life. Thus God set apart Abram. He called him from the place of his nativity, from his relations and friends, and carried him where he had occasion for him. God set apart Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, from the rest of the world, in the same manner. But it is needless to mention particular instances in this case, since it is always true, that he determines the situations and circumstances of all the godly, so as best to answer the design of their separation from the world. He actually determines when and where, every godly person shall live and die. And though the godly cannot comprehend his wise and holy purposes in their various situations, yet they will finally see that they have reason to rejoice in all his disposals. For every godly person will actually be, some way or other, instrumental in carrying into execution the great and good designs of God. He views the situations of the godly as of vastly more importance than they do themselves. He knows why he takes one here and another there, and makes him godly and fixes the bounds of his habitation in one place, rather than another. This leads me to show,

II. That God has set apart the godly from the rest of the world for his own use.

The godly are prepared for the active service of God; and he has always employed them in his active service. As he makes them godly for his use, so he uses them to carry on his great and gracious designs in the world. There are many ways in which he can employ them to advantage; and he does employ them in all the ways in which they can be the most useful. In particular,

1. God has set apart the godly for keeping up his worship in the world. Ever since men became enemies to God, they have been averse to paying him that religious homage which is his due. They have not liked to retain God in their knowl-

edge, and in order to forget him, have designedly neglected to call on his name. This has been the case in all ages. But God has meant to preserve his worship in this world, notwithstanding all the efforts of wicked men and evil spirits to destroy it. And for this purpose he has formed and set apart the godly from the rest of the world. The godly love to worship God, and take pleasure in drawing near to him, and pouring out their hearts before him, and doing honor to his great and holy name. They are fitted and disposed to keep up the worship of the one living and true God in a world that lies in wickedness. Accordingly, God has used them as instruments of maintaining his worship from age to age. Noah kept up the worship of God in the midst of the ungodly world. Abraham kept up the worship of God amidst an idolatrous world, and so did Isaac and Jacob. The Jewish nation maintained the worship of God, whilst all other nations walked after their vain imaginations and forsook the God that made them. In Babylon, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and other godly men, maintained the worship of the God of Israel. And since the gospel day, the godly have done the same service for God in the world. Had it not been for the godly, the worship of God would have long since ceased from one end of the earth to the other. But he has set apart a sufficient number of the godly in various places, to keep up the worship of himself, and to be instrumental in leading others humbly and devoutly to acknowledge their Creator.

2. God has set apart the godly to preserve pure and entire his religious institutions. Besides prayer, God has appointed other religious duties. Before the apostasy, he instituted the Sabbath, or set apart one day in seven, to be kept holy unto himself. After the apostasy, he appointed sacrifices. After sacrifices, he appointed circumcision. After circumcision, he appointed the passover. After the passover, he appointed baptism, and the Lord's supper. These positive institutions it has been the appropriate business of the godly to maintain. Adam and his family kept the Sabbath, and offered sacrifices. All the pious patriarchs till Noah offered sacrifices. Noah both before and after the flood offered sacrifices. When mankind were dispersed, and had lost the knowledge, and neglected the institutions of God, he set apart Abraham to keep them up; and this he did with singular faith, fortitude, and perseverance. His godly seed continued the practice, and walked in the steps of their father Abraham, until Christ appeared in the flesh. Then his sincere followers named his name, and supported his holy institutions. And ever since the spread of the gospel, the

godly have kept up the ordinances of Christ, which will be their proper business to the end of the world. The ordinances of the gospel are to continue to the second coming of Christ, amidst all the revolutions of nations, and all the revivals and declensions of religion, till the whole number of the godly are called in, and the great scheme of man's redemption completed. To maintain these institutions is one purpose, for which God is here and there setting apart the godly from the world and for himself.

3. God sets apart the godly to be keepers of his sacred Oracles. These are not agreeable to the corrupt hearts of men; and they would have been long since destroyed, had it not been for the care and faithfulness of the godly in preserving the sacred books of divine inspiration. These were first intrusted to the care of God's ancient people, who, amidst all their other departures from God, never gave up his written Revelation. It was their peculiar privilege to enjoy and preserve the sacred writings. The apostle demands, "What advantage hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: *chiefly*, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." This sacred deposit the Jewish church handed down to the Christian. And the Christian church have been the happy means of preserving the sacred volume to the present day. It is still the duty and privilege of the godly to keep the word of God for him, until its contents have completely answered all the purposes for which they were designed. The Bible will never be safe in any other hands but those of the godly. And they may yet find it extremely difficult to keep it uninjured from the hands of those who wish to corrupt and destroy it. But since God is able to raise up guardians of his holy word, we may confidently expect that he will, somewhere or another, set apart the godly to perform this important service for him. If the godly should cease in one place or nation, yet they shall continue in some other place or nation; and as long as they continue, it will be their duty and privilege to keep sacred the sacred books of divine inspiration.

4. God has set apart the godly, to exhibit the beauty and reality of true religion before the eyes of all mankind. God means to teach men by example as well as precept. And he raises up the godly, gives them his own spirit, and adorns them with the beauties of holiness, to show the world of the ungodly the excellency of that religion, which he has revealed, and required them to embrace and practise. God does not, however, set apart the godly as *perfect* examples. He has told

the world, that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." But yet he hath set apart many, who have exhibited the most amiable, instructive, and commanding examples. Noah condemned the ungodly world, by his holy and exemplary life. Abraham displayed a shining example of faith and self-denial. Moses was a pattern of meekness. Job was an illustrious instance of patience and submission. Mordecai and Daniel were eminent for their wisdom, firmness, and zeal. The prophets and apostles, and primitive Christians, acted out pure love to God and man under the severest trials. Indeed, all godly persons do, more or less, manifest the truth and importance of vital piety. And this is one purpose for which they are made godly and set apart from the rest of the world. Accordingly, the apostle exhorts Christians to follow the example of the prophets. "Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." Christ said to his followers, "Ye are the light of the world;" and then added, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Peter exhorts Christians to be examples to the world. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises"—or as it is in the margin, the *virtues*—"of him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." He subjoins, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." Paul exhorts Christians to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called;" and to "adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things." And to the godly at Philippi he says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." The exemplary conduct of the primitive Christians excited the admiration of the heathen world, and extorted confessions from them highly honorable to Christianity. Their example often proved the means of awakening and converting infidels to the Christian religion. And the bright example of the godly still tends to produce the same happy effects.

5. God sets apart the godly to promote his cause in the world. He makes use of instruments for this purpose, and the godly are his only proper, free, voluntary instruments. Other men are only passive, undesigning instruments; but the godly

are his free, voluntary, active agents in building up his kingdom. In the history of the divine conduct, we find many godly persons, who have been signal instruments in the hand of God, of promoting the cause of religion. Seth, Enoch, and Noah; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, Joshua, and Caleb; Samuel, David, and Solomon; and many others who might be mentioned, were active and faithful workers with God in preserving and promoting religion in the world. And all the godly are useful in this respect. By their prayers, by their instructions, by their examples, as well as by their interests and influence, they do much to build up the kingdom of God. Paul calls Aquila and Priscilla his helpers. All the godly help to carry on the work of God. This they wish may prosper, and spread; and their wishes are accompanied by their exertions. As they have opportunity and ability, they unite in their hearts to promote that cause of God, which involves their own good and the good of all holy beings. They choose to be on the Lord's side, and serve him and their generation according to his will.

6. God has set apart the godly, to be the monuments of his mercy in the view of the whole intelligent creation. For this he originally elected them to eternal life. So says the apostle, "Having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, *to the praise of the glory of his grace.*" Again, "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the *church*," that is, by the godly, "the manifold wisdom of God." And again, "Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" These passages plainly declare, that God forms and sets apart the godly to be monuments of his mercy, and to exhibit his manifold wisdom and astonishing grace before the eyes of the whole intelligent universe. And at the same time these vessels of his mercy are to be forever actively employed in celebrating the riches of his grace, in forming and setting them apart from the rest of mankind, for himself. Accordingly, the godly in heaven are represented as constantly engaged in celebrating the praises of God, for the great and marvellous things he has done in carrying on

the glorious work of redeeming grace. "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." Thus God has set apart the godly for his use here and his glory hereafter. And this, it remains to be shown,

III. Is of importance to be known. It is a great and glorious distinction in favor of the godly, and highly interesting to all intelligent beings, and therefore ought to be universally known. For,

1. It is important that the godly themselves should know their high and holy destination. They cannot feel or act properly without knowing it. It lays them under the strongest and most endearing obligations of gratitude, obedience, and activity in the service of God. An habitual sense of God's goodness in setting them apart for himself, must have a great and happy influence on their grateful hearts, to live and act for him. And,

2. It is important that the world should know, that God has set apart the godly for himself. It tends to give them just views of God, of the godly, and of themselves. There is nothing which generally makes a deeper impression on the minds of sinners, than a realizing sense of the great and awful distinction between them and the godly. It has often fastened a conviction on their conscience, which terminated in their conversion. Let the godly strike you with awe, when you reflect, that the Lord has set them apart for himself. I shall conclude with one or two reflections.

1. The godly whom the Lord has set apart for himself, ought to set themselves apart for him, by a public profession of supreme love to him and his service.

2. Those who are truly godly, may expect that God will commune with them from off the mercy-seat.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If it be a truth of importance to be known, that the Lord hath set apart the godly for himself, then it is an important duty of ministers in their preaching to keep this truth constantly in their own view, and in the view of their hearers. Of all the distinctions which God has ever made among his creatures, the distinction between the godly and the ungodly is the greatest. He has made a great distinction among the angels, in setting apart the holy from the unholy, for himself; but he has made a much greater distinction among the equally

and totally depraved children of Adam, in setting apart the godly from the ungodly, for his own use. This distinction he has revealed in his word, from Genesis to the Revelations; and according to this distinction he has been governing the whole world, from the first apostasy to the present day. "Know then," says the Psalmist, "that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." God himself enjoined it upon the priests, who were preachers under the law, to make this great truth known to the people. "And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." Thus saith the Lord to Jeremiah, "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced, brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, to save thee, and to deliver thee, saith the Lord." As the distinction between the godly and ungodly is the greatest and most interesting distinction God has ever made, or will make; so it is of all distinctions the most displeasing to the ungodly. Accordingly, the preachers of the word of God, from age to age, have more generally denied this distinction, or neglected to make it known, than any other distinction in the Bible. Many openly and boldly deny that God ever had a right to set apart the godly for himself, in distinction from the ungodly; and consequently that he never did it. And many, who partly or fully believe that God did from eternity set apart the godly for himself, either neglect to exhibit and support this great distinction, or very rarely and obscurely bring it into view. Indeed they are hardly willing that their people should know that they do believe it, and utterly unwilling to cause their people to know and believe it, by the most plain and forcible arguments they are able to use. Their excuse is, that it is an unprofitable truth to be known, and very unpleasing to the ungodly. That it is displeasing to the ungodly cannot be denied; but that it is unprofitable, none have a right to believe; for God has revealed it, and commanded his ministers to preach it, as lying at the foundation of the whole gospel. There is, perhaps, no one truth in the Bible which is of more importance to be preached, and to be made clearly known, than the plain, simple truth, that the Lord hath set apart the godly for himself; nor is there any other truth which has fastened a stronger conviction of danger and guilt on the consciences of sinners, and done them more good than this.

2. If God has set apart the godly for himself; then we may conclude, that he has a peculiar regard for them. They are godly. They are like himself. They are holy as he is holy. They love what he loves, and hate what he hates. They love his character, his perfections, his purposes, and all his operations in the works of creation, of providence, and of grace. They bear his image, espouse his cause, and do the things that he has required. They are his cordial friends and faithful servants. They are, therefore, objects of his peculiar complacency and delight. Though he loves all mankind with benevolence, yet he loves none but the godly with complacence. So long as men continue in a state of disaffection and disobedience to him, he views them with disapprobation and displeasure; but as soon as any renounce their disaffection, and become reconciled to him, he views them as godly, and worthy of his peculiar complacency and regard. He calls them by the most endearing names, and speaks of them in language the most tender and affectionate. He calls them his friends—his beloved—his jewels—his treasure—his temple—&c. These appellations are expressive of his peculiar affection towards them. And in speaking of them, he uses still stronger expressions of complacency and delight. By the prophet Zephaniah he says to the daughter of Zion, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." God has as clearly manifested his peculiar regard for those whom he has set apart for himself, by his conduct, as by his word. He has always watched over, guarded, and defended them, amidst the combined opposition of the whole ungodly world. This he declares he has done for them. "But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." This God declares he has done for those whom he has set apart for himself, and more than this, he promises to do for them in time to come. Speaking of the godly under the similitude of a vineyard, he says, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it; I will keep it night and day." Though mankind in general have been so blind and stupid as to disbelieve, that God hath set apart the godly for himself; yet he has given most striking evidence in his word and provi-

dence, that he has chosen, formed, and set apart the godly for himself, and employed them as the most efficient and useful instruments in setting up and pulling down kingdoms and nations, and in bringing about the greatest revolutions, that have ever been in the world. All history, whether sacred or profane, gives indubitable evidence, that God continually governs the whole world in subordination to his own glory, and the preservation, protection, and edification of the godly, whom he has set apart for himself, and regards with complacency and delight. When they were few in number, "he suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

3. If God has set apart the godly for himself, as instruments of promoting his own glory and the good of the whole universe; then they are worthy of the esteem and regard of the world. Their hearts are enlarged, to desire and promote the good of all mankind. They are not mere lovers of themselves, but lovers of all the children of men, in every part and nation of the world. They seek not their own things, but the things of others. They have actually done more for the temporal and spiritual benefit of mankind, than all the other men in the world. Who ever did more good in the days that they lived, than Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Samuel, and the prophets; "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens?" Since their day, there have been many godly and eminently useful men, who have been the greatest benefactors to the world. All the godly are the excellent of the earth, and worthy of the esteem and regard of the men of the world, who have always been disposed to despise, to reproach, and oppose them. But God has given them great and precious promises, which may well support and encourage them to go on in doing good to the evil and unthankful.

4. If God has set apart the godly for his own use; then they hold a high and important station in the world. He has entrusted the infinitely important interests of religion to their care and fidelity. It has been owing to the godly, that religion has not been banished from the world ages and ages ago. The godly preserved religion from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to this day. We are indebted to the godly for all the religious privileges and advantages we enjoy. The godly

brought the Bible, the Sabbath, public worship, and family worship, from their native country to this. The godly planted, preserved, and multiplied our churches. The godly set up and maintained public worship, and set the example of religious worship in families. And notwithstanding all the men of the world say and do, to maintain divine ordinances and divine worship, they would everywhere become extinct, were it not for the faith, the zeal, example, and exertions of the godly. In any place, where the godly fail in numbers and zeal, religion and all divine ordinances languish and die. There are not a few such melancholy cases to be found at this enlightened day, and enlightened part of the world. If the godly should neglect to keep the Sabbath, would not the ungodly neglect it? If the godly should neglect public worship, would not the ungodly neglect it? If the godly should neglect the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, would not the ungodly totally disregard them? If the godly should entirely neglect family prayer, would not the ungodly disregard and despise it? Would not every form of religion disappear, if the godly did not keep it up? God has set apart the godly for himself and lodged the great interests of religion in their hands, and it will everywhere flourish, or decay, according as they are faithful or unfaithful in discharging the solemn trust reposed in them. The godly in every town or parish are the pillars and ground of the truth, and if these fall anywhere, the truth will fall with them; and they must answer for the unhappy consequences of their unfaithfulness.

5. Since the Lord hath set apart the godly to be his servants in promoting his cause in the world, it is their indispensable duty to be united in affection, in sentiment, and in practice. They ought to love as brethren, be joined together in the same mind, speak the same things, and set the same example before one another, and before the ungodly world. Let them be united in these respects, and they will encourage each other's hearts, strengthen each other's hands, and inspire each other with fortitude, resolution, and zeal, in the work of the Lord. But if they cherish mutual discord, imbibe different religious sentiments, and set different examples, they will counteract and defeat each other's exertions, and lose all their strength. These are the unhappy causes which weaken the strength of many churches at the present day, and expose them to the reproach of the world. If one member neglects to keep the Sabbath; if another neglects to attend public worship; if another does not punctually come to the table of Christ; if another does not avoid all appearance of evil; if another does not maintain the

form of religion in his family, nor instruct, nor restrain those under his care and control; such a contrariety of conduct must sully the reputation, and weaken the power and influence, of any church. It is the indispensable duty of the godly in every church, to check, restrain, and banish from among themselves, as far as possible, all such causes of discord and inconsistency, and to study the things which make for peace, and tend to edify one another. Let them serve one another in love, and they will not fail to serve the cause of God, and to promote the spiritual good of the ungodly. Let them only be united to one another in the bonds of brotherly love, and the world will not attempt to disturb their union; or if they do attempt it, they will only strengthen the union of the godly, and make them terrible as an army with banners.

6. Since the Lord has set apart the godly for his own use, to promote the great cause in which he himself is engaged, it highly concerns them to seek after higher and higher attainments in knowledge and grace. They are but little children in the knowledge of the gospel, and in the Christian virtues and graces. The apostle, therefore, exhorts them as new-born babes, to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As the peculiar servants of God, who have great and arduous duties to perform, great and formidable difficulties to surmount, and peculiar trials to experience, they need large measures of knowledge and grace, in order to become the most serviceable to God, and most useful to men. When Solomon was elevated to the throne of Israel, and had the cares and concerns of a large kingdom devolved upon him, he felt as a little child, and devoutly prayed for a *wise* and understanding heart. Paul, the servant of God, felt his insufficiency, forgot his past attainments, and pressed forward in a constant course of gaining knowledge, and growing in grace and usefulness. Knowledge and grace are of great importance to the godly, to qualify and dispose them to discharge the great and peculiar duties for which God has set them apart, and for which they have given up themselves to him. The godly never had a more arduous and important part to act, than they have at this day of great degeneracy in doctrine and practice. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold; which requires the godly to renew their strength, redouble their diligence, watchfulness, and care, in defending and promoting the declining cause of God. And just so far as they realize their being set apart for this great purpose, they will seek for increasing knowledge and grace to do their duty. They will find it neces-

sary to read much, meditate much, pray much, and devoutly and constantly attend all divine ordinances, which are appointed for their edification, and growth in knowledge and grace; and resolve with David, that they will run in the way of the divine commands, when God shall enlarge their hearts.

7. This subject calls upon all the professors of godliness, to inquire whether they are going forward or backward in the discharge of their peculiar duties to God and man. Do you watch over yourselves and one another, as you formerly did? If you are Christians, you are generally old disciples. You have been long in the vineyard of Christ. You have had much time, and great opportunities, to make advances in Christian knowledge, piety, and usefulness. You have seen much work to be done for God and man, in the town in which you have lived, in the parish in which you have lived, in the neighborhood in which you have lived, and in the families in which you have lived. Have you faithfully discharged the various, difficult, and important duties which have resulted from all these relations and connections in which God has placed you, and set you apart for his service? Have you constantly read the Bible in your families? Have you constantly prayed in your families? Have you instructed, admonished, and restrained your children, and all committed to your care? Have you kept the Sabbath yourselves, and commanded your households to keep it? Have you constantly come to the house of God on the Sabbath, and brought your children and households with you? Have you attended the public services, which you have appointed as proper and necessary to prepare yourselves to celebrate the memorials of Christ's death? Have you become more, or less, strict and constant in discharging these duties? You are able to form a just estimate of your past and present fidelity. It is certainly your duty, to determine whether you are going forward or backward in your Christian course. If you are going forward, persevere in well-doing; or if you are going backward, return to the course of your better days. Your obligations are constantly increasing; you will soon finish your course; the day of decision is at hand, and you will soon reap as you have sown,—a glorious reward, or an aggravated condemnation.

SERMON II.

REAL SAINTS DISINTERESTED.

"Seeketh not her own."—1 Cor. xiii. 5.

The Corinthians were disposed to overrate and pervert the supernatural *gifts*, which the Spirit of God had bestowed upon them. To cure them of this dangerous error, the apostle teaches them, that there is a wide difference between the *gifts* and the *graces* of the Spirit; and to illustrate this important distinction, he supposes that he might possess any and every spiritual gift, while entirely destitute of saving grace. He says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, *seeketh not her own*, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." According to this description of charity, it cannot mean a mere good opinion of the piety and virtue of others, nor a mere natural disposition to pity and relieve those in a suffering state; but it must mean that disinterested love, which comprises every gracious affection, and forms the essential difference between a saint and a sinner. This then is the truth

which properly falls under our present consideration: That real saints are disinterested. I shall first explain this general observation, and then illustrate the truth of it.

I. The first thing is to explain what is meant by saints being disinterested. We are not to understand by this, that they have no regard to their own happiness. They ought to regard their own good, which is truly valuable, and worthy of their desire and pursuit. The good man's happiness through every period of his existence is immensely valuable in itself considered, and therefore he ought to regard it according to its intrinsic worth and importance. Accordingly, he does value his eternal interests vastly more, than the men of the world value their temporal interests. Though Paul despised the world and the things of the world, yet this one thing he did: he pressed "towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Moses, while suffering affliction with the people of God, had respect to the recompense of reward. And even Christ himself endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy set before him, by the Father.

Nor again do we mean by saints being disinterested, that they take no pleasure in the exercise of holy, disinterested love. They take more pleasure in the exercise of benevolence, than sinners do in the exercise of selfishness. It is more a delight to them to do good, than it is a sport to a fool to do mischief. Job enjoyed a higher satisfaction in being eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, a father to the fatherless, and causing the widow's heart to sing for joy, than the Pharisees did in devouring widows' houses, and grinding the faces of the poor, to gratify their selfish, avaricious spirit. Paul found a nobler pleasure in building up, than he ever did in pulling down the church of Christ, though in the former case he sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved. And while Christ was going about doing good, he said it was his meat, to do the will of Him who sent him, and to finish his benevolent work. It is contrary to scripture, reason, and experience, to suppose that that charity which seeketh not her own, should afford no pleasure to those who feel and express it.

But you will now ask, What is meant by their being disinterested, if it does not mean that they are regardless of their own good, nor that they take no pleasure in feeling and expressing pure benevolence? I answer, by their being disinterested is meant their placing their own happiness in the happiness of others. In this respect their disinterested benevolence stands in direct opposition to selfishness. Sinners are entirely selfish. They place all their happiness in their own

private good, and regard the good of others no farther than they imagine it tends to promote their own. But saints place their happiness in the happiness of others, and regard it as really and as highly as their own. Now, that this is really disinterested love, our Saviour illustrated by a very striking case, in answer to a question upon this very subject. "Behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, what is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering, said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? And Jesus answering, said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil, and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." Is not here a plain instance of disinterested benevolence? Did not the Samaritan place his happiness in the happiness of the wounded man? Did he not sacrifice his own interest to promote the interest of the wounded man? Was not his love to the distressed object disinterested love? Did the priest and Levite place their happiness in the happiness of the wounded man? Did they not regard their own interests, and disregard his? Did they not act a perfectly selfish part, which was diametrically opposite to the benevolent part which the Samaritan acted? Did not the Samaritan take more pleasure in his feelings and conduct than the priest and Levite did in theirs? But would it not have been base ingratitude in the relieved man to have said, "I do not thank the Samaritan for his kind-

ness to me, because he took a real pleasure and satisfaction in preserving my life, and consequently was as selfish as the priest and Levite? And must it not be absurd in us to call the love of the Samaritan selfish and mean, which our Saviour pronounced benevolent, disinterested, and virtuous? The way is now prepared to show,

II. That all real saints are possessed of such disinterested love as has been explained.

If we search the scriptures we shall find, that disinterested affection is universally represented as essential to the character of real saints.

In the first place, we find a variety of precepts which enjoin upon all men the exercise of disinterested love. The second great commandment is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." That is, thou shall place thy happiness in thy neighbor's happiness, and desire and promote it, as thy own; which is really *disinterested* benevolence, and diametrically opposite to selfishness. Christ required his disciples to love their enemies, and to do good to them that hated and injured them; which was requiring them to be disinterested in their feelings and conduct. The apostle enjoins it upon Christians, to "look not every man on his own things, but every man, also, on the things of others;"—"in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves;" and to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Obedience to these commands is essential to the character of real saints, and so far as they obey them, they are really *disinterested*. On the other hand, selfishness is represented as a reproach to Christians, and a characteristic of sinners. Paul speaking of preachers says, "All seek their *own*, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Again he says, "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves." God by the mouth of Zechariah demands of the sinners in Zion, "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?" Christ upbraided those who followed him for the loaves; and condemned the Pharisees for making long prayers, for the purpose of devouring widows' houses. He spake the parable of the prosperous farmer, who laid up goods for many years, with a design to illustrate the sin and folly of all selfish designs and pursuits. For he subjoins, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." If selfishness be inconsistent

with the Christian character, then disinterested love must be essential to it.

Christ, in all his public and private discourses, made disinterested benevolence a necessary qualification for all his disciples. It was his common saying, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." When a certain man seemed desirous to follow him, he reminded him, that he could not become his disciple, without self-denial, or pure, disinterested love. "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." When the rich young man wished to know upon what terms he could become his disciple, he expressly told him, he must sell all that he had, and give to the poor, and come and follow him. And he required all his followers to love him more than father or mother, son or daughter, houses or lands, or even their own lives; which was precisely the same, as requiring them to exercise that disinterested and supreme love to him, which is diametrically opposite to selfishness.

It is essential to the character of Christians, that they possess the same love, which Christ possessed and manifested in all he did and suffered here on earth. The apostle declares, "If any man have not the *spirit* of Christ, he is none of his." And he exhorts Christians, "Let the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus." Was not the love of Christ disinterested love? He says he sought not his own glory, but the glory of him who sent him. His whole life was one continued scene of self-denial. The glory of God and the good of men was the governing motive of all his conduct. He put it beyond doubt, that he placed his happiness in the good of the universe, not in his own private felicity. All his real friends, therefore, are of the same character, and possess the same spirit of pure, disinterested benevolence.

It is to be lamented indeed, that such a spirit has been very rare since the first apostasy; but if we may give credit to the Bible, we shall find many signal instances of it recorded by the pen of inspiration. The first instance I shall mention is Abraham. God required him to sacrifice his only beloved son Isaac, with his own hand. What could have been more trying to every natural, or selfish feeling of Abraham's heart? But instead of remonstrating, murmuring, or repining, he promptly and cheerfully obeys the will of his Maker. Was not this loving God more than his son, or himself, and exercising pure, holy, supreme, disinterested love. Moses is another instance of a disinterested servant of God. He forsook the wealth and

honors of Egypt; and suffered affliction with the people of God, for the sake of promoting their happiness, and his glory, in their salvation. Yea, he proposed to be blotted out of the book of life, rather than have the Church of God destroyed. David was a man after God's own heart, and possessed the spirit of his heavenly Father. He loved Saul his mortal enemy, and spared his life, when he had it in his power to take it away in a lawful manner. At another time he entreated God to slay him, rather than spread death and destruction among his people. Though Satan accused Job of being selfish; yet God demonstrated to him and to the world, that he possessed pure, disinterested love. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, exposed their bodies to the fiery furnace, and Daniel risked his life in the den of lions, to promote the honor of God and the interests of his kingdom, in the land of idols and idolaters. Paul told the Corinthians, "I seek not *yours*, but you." And he solemnly declared, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." The time would fail me to mention the long catalogue of worthies in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and in the history of the martyrs, who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and sacrificed their lives in the cause of Christ. But it appears from the instances which have been mentioned, that some good men in all ages have given us as clear and incontestable evidence of their having had disinterested love, as their lives and deaths could exhibit.

Thus it appears from the whole current of scripture, that the love which characterizes all good men, is, strictly speaking, disinterested: and this representation, we may now observe, is agreeable to the dictates of reason, and the moral sense of all mankind. The question concerning the nature of true virtue, or moral goodness, has been agitated for more than two thousand years, by some of the most learned and ingenious men in the world. The heathen moralists were divided in their opinions respecting the nature of true virtue, or moral goodness; some maintaining that it is disinterested, and others placing it in mere natural, selfish affections. But Cicero, who was thoroughly acquainted with all the mythology of the heathen world from the earliest antiquity, maintained, that true virtue is disinterested, and wrote a large treatise upon the subject. With him the best moral philosophers of his day agreed. The question, however, has been ever since, and is still, agitated

among all denominations of Christians, whether virtue, or true holiness, be disinterested or not; though few divines have plainly asserted that there is any moral goodness or virtue in selfishness. It is the practical opinion of all men, whether learned or unlearned, that true virtue consists in disinterested love; and none ever deny it, only in their disputes upon some favorite sentiment. It is demonstrable by reason, that virtue is disinterested. For if virtue be not disinterested, it is impossible to see and point out any distinction between virtue and vice. If all men are selfish, and selfishness is virtue; then those who are the most selfish, are the most virtuous. But who ever believed this to be true? Who ever believed that there is no distinction between virtue and vice? All nations have words to distinguish virtue from vice, right from wrong, moral good from moral evil. All nations approve and reward some actions, and disapprove and punish others. But this would be absurd, if all men act from precisely the same supreme motive,—their own personal, private good. On this supposition, no man could be blamed for loving himself more than God, more than his neighbor, more than his nation, and more than the whole universe; nor for sacrificing the glory of God, and the good of the universe, to promote his own separate, private interest. Indeed, there would be no foundation for blaming or praising any man, for any of his actions; because there could be no such thing as right or wrong, virtue or vice, in the universe. But who does not blame himself and others for selfishness? Who does not blame a man for offering or accepting a bribe? Who does not blame a ruler for injustice, oppression, and tyranny? Who does not blame a subject for rebelling against a good administration of government, and trampling upon the wise and just laws of his country? Who does not blame men for deception, perjury, and murder? But all these actions flow from selfishness, and cannot be criminal, if selfishness be not criminal, and essentially different from disinterested benevolence. But, perhaps, some may ask, whether selfishness, under certain limitations and restraints, may not be right, and truly virtuous? I answer, that no limitations or restraints can alter the nature of selfishness, which is diametrically opposite to disinterested benevolence, which is right and virtuous in the nature of things. It is true, that selfishness may be so limited or restrained by human or divine laws, that it cannot produce the ill effects which it naturally tends to produce. But restraining its tendency cannot alter its criminal nature. Hence the apostle Paul said, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

Covetousness is selfishness, and selfishness in the least degree is sinful, whether it lie in the heart, or be acted out. That which is right in the nature of things, is always right, under all supposable circumstances; and that which is wrong in the nature of things, is always wrong, under all supposable circumstances; and no human, no divine laws can alter the nature of selfishness, nor of benevolence. So that there is no essential difference between limited and unlimited selfishness. If, therefore, there be any essential difference between virtue and vice; or if there be any such thing as either virtue or vice, virtue must consist in disinterested benevolence, and vice in selfishness. The most ingenious writers in favor of selfishness have never been able to do any more than to make it appear, under some circumstances, like benevolence, and, under that appearance, like virtue. But after all, they could never make it appear that benevolence is wrong. This, however, must be true, if selfishness be right. Why then have not the advocates for selfishness ever attempted to prove that benevolence is wrong? This would be to their purpose, and put the question concerning the nature of virtue to perpetual rest. In a word, if there be any one moral and theological truth, which can be completely established by arguments drawn from scripture, reason, and common sense, it is this: that virtue consists in disinterested benevolence, and is essential to the character of every good man in the world.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If true love to God be disinterested, then the least degree of true love is supreme. Christians cannot love God for what he is in himself, or on account of his own moral and supreme excellence, without loving him supremely; that is, more than they love themselves, or any other, or all other creatures. This our Saviour always insisted upon in his preaching. He required his disciples to love him more than their friends, and more than life, and all the blessings of life. He required the rich young man to love him more than all his wealth. He required Peter to love him above every other object, in order to prove his sincere affection to him. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" and he repeated the question again and again. This emphatically implied, that if Peter did not love him supremely, he did not love him at all. A man cannot love the glory of God and the good of the universe, according to the excellence and importance of these objects,

without loving them more than himself, and all other objects. He that loves himself, or any created object, more than the glory of God and the good of the universe, prefers a less good to that which is infinitely greater; which is a sinful and selfish affection, and precisely the same that governs the hearts of all sinners. For this reason, the scripture represents the lowest degree of true love to God, or disinterested benevolence, as forming the essential distinction between a saint and a sinner. "Every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God," and is not a real Christian. It is not the degree, but the nature, of true love to God, which forms the essential difference between saints and sinners. And this it is easy to see, since true love is really disinterested, and totally contrary to the least exercise of selfishness.

2. If true love to God be disinterested, then every real Christian will give up whatever the glory of God requires. Whenever he sees his interests to stand in competition with the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom, he will voluntarily give up his interests for the sake of promoting his glory. Christ forewarned his disciples and followers, that they would often be called to sacrifice their ease, their friends, their interests, and all that they had in the world, for his sake and the gospel's; and plainly told them that they would not be his followers, unless they made such sacrifices. Accordingly we find, when they were put to the test, they did give up and forsake all, for the honor of Christ and the advancement of his cause and kingdom in the world. And all real Christians are disposed to make the same sacrifices, when they are called to it, and exercise a disinterested and Christian spirit. God requires the same disinterested love now that he required of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and primitive Christians, though he does not often place them under the same circumstances. Instead of trying them with persecution, he tries them with prosperity. But it requires the same disinterested love to conduct properly in prosperity as in adversity. It is no easier to be a real and exemplary Christian now than it was in the apostle's day. And Christians may now give as clear evidence of their possessing pure, disinterested love as the primitive Christians did. They have their troubles, their trials, and afflictions, which call for the exercise of self-denial, or pure, disinterested benevolence; and they must exercise it in order to give evidence to themselves, and to the world, that they love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

3. If true love to God be disinterested, then all schemes of religion which are built upon selfishness are essentially wrong,

and fatal to those who cordially embrace them. There are many such schemes of religion propagated and embraced at this day. Arminianism, Antinomianism, Unitarianism, and Universalism, are all founded upon selfish principles; and the various denominations of Christians, who embrace these various schemes of religion, disbelieve, deny, and condemn the doctrine of disinterested benevolence. We may charitably hope that some in these denominations do not understandingly believe their own schemes, nor understandingly disbelieve the disinterested doctrines of the Gospel. But all who do embrace from the heart and understandingly any scheme of doctrines which is founded in selfishness, are building upon the sand, and will be overthrown, unless they understand, love, and obey the truth as it is in Jesus.

4. If true love to God be disinterested, then none can determine whether they are truly religious, by the strength, but only by the nature of their religious affections. Selfishness may produce as high religious affections, as pure, disinterested benevolence. But high selfish affections are no better than low. Let men love God ever so sensibly and warmly, merely because they hope he loves them, and intends to make them forever happy; this gives them no evidence that they are real Christians. But if they sensibly exercise disinterested love to God, this is good evidence.

5. If true love to God and men be disinterested, then Christians give more clear and convincing evidence of their sincerity, by their common and ordinary conduct, than by their duties of devotion. They may give evidence both ways, and do, but their common conduct in their common employments and pursuits gives the most clear and convincing evidence. Is not this the common opinion of the world? and is it not well founded?

6. If true love to God be disinterested, then sinners perform no duty acceptably to God, until the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. They are altogether selfish before.

7. If true love to God be disinterested, then we see why saints are more sensible of their moral imperfections than sinners. They are not so apt to take selfishness for duty, as sinners are.

8. Let all examine, whether they possess the spirit of the gospel. It is highly necessary to determine this question.

This is the question to be decided at the last day.

SERMON III.

THE VICTORY OF FAITH.

"And this is the victory that overcometh the world; even our faith."—1 John, v. 4.

The apostles felt a constant and tender concern for those whom they converted to the Christian faith. They knew they were exposed to peculiar danger as long as they lived in this present evil world. Hence they directed all their epistles to believers, and not to unbelievers. In compassion to Christians, they abundantly exhorted them to guard against the world, as the most dangerous enemy to their spiritual interests. But the apostle John seems to have had the largest portion of brotherly love to his fellow Christians, and to have been the most concerned to prevent their being ensnared and overcome by the world. In this epistle especially his main object was to place the world in a true light, that Christians might realize their danger, and use all proper means to avoid it. He would have them consider the world as an enemy to be resisted and overcome. And he would have them remember, that they could not maintain their Christian character, without actually overcoming the world. For if they had the spirit of the gospel, and were really born of God, they must live in the exercise of that faith which would raise them above the power and influence of all worldly objects: "For," says he, "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world; even our faith." That is to say, we Christians overcome the world by a sincere, lively, cordial belief of that gospel which has brought life and immortality to light. The spirit of the text may be expressed in this plain doctrine: It is by faith that Christians overcome the world.

I shall first show that the world is an enemy to Christians; and then show that it is by faith they overcome it.

I. We are to consider, that the world is an enemy to Christians. If this be a truth, it deserves their most serious consideration, and ought to lie with perpetual weight on their minds. All the inspired writers represent the world as hostile to the peace, and comfort, and edification of Christians; and warn them to beware of its dangerous influence. The apostle represents it in the text as an enemy, which all true believers actually resist, and do in some measure overcome. But how can the world, which God has made for the temporary habitation and benefit of mankind, be a real enemy to his children, whom he allows and even requires to live in it? It is, indeed, one of the mysterious parts of God's conduct, that he causes his friends to live in a world which is so hostile, and often so detrimental, to the holiness and happiness of the heirs of heaven. But it always has been the case, and we have reason to expect it always will be the case, until the whole number of the elect are called in, and the whole frame of the world is dissolved. Still it is a question, how the world is an enemy to Christians. To this it may be replied,

1. The objects of the world tend to divert the attention, and alienate the affections, of Christians from God. The things of the world are apt to make the same impressions on the views and feelings of Christians, that they make upon the men of the world. And we know that worldly things engross the attention and affections, and stupify the consciences of worldly men. The Bible exhibits striking instances of the corrupting influence of worldly objects upon the minds of unbelievers. The world destroyed him who lived in ease and affluence, and fared sumptuously every day. The world destroyed him who laid up goods for many years, and resolved to live in the love and enjoyment of mere earthly things. The love of the world led Demas to forsake his duty, and the cause of Christ. In all these cases, the objects of the world engrossed the attention, and stupified the hearts and consciences, of those who were destroyed by it. Worldly objects are extremely apt to steal into the affections of real Christians, and before they are aware of it, blind their minds with respect to all the objects of faith. Things seen tend to divert their attention and affections from those great, and invisible, and eternal realities which are the only source of spiritual and divine enjoyments. In this way, all the scenes and objects of the present world are really unfriendly to Christians, and often pierce them through with many sorrows. The world is too strong for their faith, and often overcomes them, and robs them of the most solid peace and comfort in the discharge of every duty.

2. The spirit of the world is inimical to the followers of Christ: for it is a spirit diametrically opposite to the spirit of Christianity. The men of the world are entirely governed by a worldly spirit. They are of the world, and pursue the world, and speak of the world. They implicitly and explicitly proclaim the world to be the supreme good, which it is the interest of all men to pursue. This is their inward thought, and their habitual feeling, which they wish to diffuse among all with whom they are conversant. It is this spirit which unites and strengthens all the world against Christianity. They know its power to corrupt the hearts, and weaken the hands, of Christians; and accordingly they omit no opportunity of opposing them, by this mild, gentle, and infatuating spirit. It is this spirit of the world which is the most dangerous enemy that Christians ever meet with in the present state of trial. It meets them in all places, in all companies, and in all circumstances of life. It attacks them in the most unguarded and defenceless part. It is next to impossible not to catch the spirit, and enter into the views and feelings, of those with whom they are almost constantly conversant; especially when the spirit they express seems to be harmless, agreeable, and entertaining. The world, instead of conforming to Christians, have always endeavored to induce Christians to conform to their spirit; and they have too often succeeded. As long as the great majority of mankind possess a worldly spirit, and Christians are obliged to mix with them, they will be continually exposed to imbibe a worldly spirit, which will unfit them for the service and enjoyment of God. Besides,

3. The cares and concerns of the world are hostile to a devout and heavenly life. Christians, like the rest of mankind, are bound in duty, and obliged by necessity, to labor six days in the week, and steadily pursue their secular callings. While they are employed in these, they are in danger of letting interest rather than duty govern their views and feelings, which turns their common business into an enemy to their spiritual good. All worldly concerns have a tendency to excite and nourish a worldly spirit. All Christians are continually liable to be led from the path of duty by the very duties they are bound to perform. The danger in one employment is nearly as great as in another. Whether a man's business employs his head or his hands, it is very apt to corrupt the motives of his conduct. Worldly concerns, therefore, of all kinds, are naturally prejudicial to a life of faith and devotion; and all Christians are in danger of being ensnared by their common and lawful pursuits. Thus the world, in all respects, is a perpetual

enemy to Christians. Its objects, its spirit, its necessary concerns, all unite their influence to obstruct their progress in the way to heaven. This enemy they have to meet, resist, and overcome every day, as long as they abide in the flesh. I now proceed to show,

II. That it is by faith, that they overcome the world. "This is the victory," says the apostle, "that overcometh the world; even our faith." He supposes that all Christians in a measure overcome the world. And this is the general representation of scripture. They are said to have their "conversation in heaven; to live in the spirit; to be risen with Christ; to seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; to set their affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; to be dead to sin; and crucified to the world and the world to them." All Christians have the same spirit, and gain the same kind of victory over the world, and by the same means. It is by faith. Faith in invisible and eternal realities has a direct and powerful tendency to overcome the corrupting influence of worldly objects. For in the eyes of faith they appear in their true light, as empty, and vain, and unworthy to be compared with the great and glorious objects of eternity. Here then it may be observed,

1. That it is by faith in God, that Christians overcome the world. A realizing sense of the being, the perfections, and presence of God, makes the world appear as nothing, and less than nothing, and vanity. When the attention and hearts of Christians are fixed upon God, and they feel themselves surrounded by his presence as well as supported by his hand, the glory of the world vanishes, and God appears to be all in all. And while their supreme attention and affections are immediately placed upon God, neither the world, nor the things of the world, can move them from the path of duty, or the source of happiness. They feel as David did when he said, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." All the terrors of the world vanish in the view of the divine favor and presence. Hence we read, that Moses "endured as seeing him who is invisible." While Christians, in the exercise of faith, view God as on their side, they feel that there is more for them, than against them. So David said he felt. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" By faith in God, Christians take hold of his strength, and become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. They feel all the security that almighty power, infinite wisdom, perfect goodness, and unfailing faithfulness

can afford. And this faith makes them
world, and able to overcome it.

2. Faith in Christ enables Christi
Much of their weakness arises from a
desert. They feel that they might justly be le
and denied the favor, the presence, and protection of Go
when they exercise a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has atoned for all their sins, they see a just ground of unshaken confidence in the pardoning mercy of God. And while they renounce all dependence upon their own goodness, they can confide in the atoning blood of Christ, to recommend them to the divine favor, and entitle them to everlasting life. Every Christian can adopt the language of Paul. "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." While Christians view by an eye of faith the divine Redeemer, who died to atone for their sins, who lives to intercede for their perseverance, and who reigns for their final salvation, they feel a courage and confidence, which bears them above all the scenes and objects, and all the storms and tempests of the present life, that have a tendency to obstruct them in the duties and enjoyments of religion. Because Christ lives they shall live, and because Christ reigns they shall conquer and overcome the world, which he is able to put under his own feet, and the feet of all his friends.

3. Faith in the divine promises, serves to give Christians the victory over the world. God has made great and precious promises to all who embrace the gospel and believe in Christ. He has promised to afford them his presence, the gracious influences of his Spirit, to guard them against the dangers to which they are exposed, to give them peace and consolation, and finally to conduct them to his heavenly kingdom. He has promised to hear and answer their prayers, and in a word, to make all things work together for their good. While Christians by faith in the divine promises, rely upon the faithfulness of God, they have courage and resolution to resist and overcome the world. It was by faith in the divine promises, that Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and all the ancient patriarchs overcame the world, and conquered all their spiritual enemies. They beheld the promises afar off, and embraced them, and while they embraced them, they were superior to all the opposition they met with from the world. And faith in the divine promises still inspires Christians with courage, forti-

ude, and zeal to fight the good fight of faith, and to overcome all the obstacles that lie in their way to eternal life. I may add,

4. Nothing has a greater tendency to give Christians the victory over the world, than a strong and lively faith in the holiness and happiness of a future and eternal state. Time always vanishes in the view of eternity, and this world in the view of the next. The primitive Christians lived under a habitual and realizing sense of the invisible and eternal world. They had a strong and lively faith in the glory and blessedness of heaven, which carried them above all the evils and calamities of this present life. They reckoned the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory which was to be revealed in them in heaven. They consoled themselves with the thought, that though their outward man perished, yet their inward man was renewed day by day. They could say with the apostle, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." David said unto God long before he died, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness." And his last words corresponded with his previous faith and hope. "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire." Whenever Christians have a clear and impressive sense of a glorious and blessed eternity, whether in health or sickness, whether in earlier or later life, they feel an ascendency over the world, which affords them peculiar satisfaction and enjoyment. The more Christians live in the faith, in the light, in the hope, and in the prospect of a blessed immortality, the more completely they gain the victory over the world.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If it be by faith that Christians overcome the world, then faith will turn the world into a friend to them. It is naturally their enemy; but when they conquer it by faith, it becomes their friend. This is a glorious world when viewed and conquered by faith. It appears to be full of the goodness of the Lord. It tends to lead the minds of Christians to God, and to give them a delightful view of all his glorious perfections, and of all his wise, and holy, and gracious designs. The works of

God in this world, more clearly display the perfections of his nature, than any other of his works of creation. There is a far greater variety in his works on earth, than in any other of his works in any other part of the universe, that we are acquainted with. And this vast variety eminently displays his manifold wisdom, and manifold goodness, and manifold sovereignty. Here are more than ten thousand different species of living creatures, which display the wisdom of God in their formation, and in the vast variety of purposes which they are designed to answer, and do answer; and which display the extensive and diffusive goodness of God in supplying their innumerable wants. Among the noblest works of God in this lower world are the immense multitudes of mankind, who are rational and immortal beings, and who exhibit an astonishing uniformity and variety in their features, talents, dispositions, and pursuits. These are all wonderfully and fearfully made, and display the power, the wisdom, the goodness, and the sovereignty of their great and glorious Creator. Not only the works of creation, but the works of providence in this world, more clearly and strikingly display the divine perfections, than they are displayed in any other part of the universe. It is here, that God is employing angels and men in carrying on his greatest, wisest, and best designs, and preparing things for the final, fullest, and brightest display of all his glory. Such is this world, when viewed by the eye of faith in the scriptures of truth. And this great and good world was made, and is governed, for the benefit of true believers, who are the heirs of salvation. And when they view the world in this light, it appears to be their friend, and not their enemy; for all the great things, good things, evil things, and mean things in it, are mutually conspiring to promote their holiness and happiness both in time and eternity. With an eye of faith Eliphaz viewed this world in this light, and he presented his conceptions of it to Job as a consolation to him in the midst of his afflictions. He says, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty; for he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the

beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and not sin. Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it and know thou it for thy good." The apostle speaks the same consoling language to Christians, who overcome the world. "All things are yours: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." By overcoming the world, Christians may make everything in it friendly to their present, future, and everlasting good.

2. If it is by faith that Christians overcome the world, then they ought to live in the constant and lively exercise of faith. The world in which they live is full of enemies, which they are obliged to meet, resist, and overcome every day, and everywhere, and which they cannot overcome, without the constant exercise of that faith which makes future things present, and invisible things visible. All true believers who have heretofore overcome the world have lived by faith. They not only embraced the gospel at first by faith, but they lived a life of faith, in God, in his promises, and in the invisible realities of the invisible world. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." By this faith, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and his spiritual seed overcome the world. For we are told, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers, and pilgrims, on the earth." "They desired a better country; that is, an heavenly. Wherefore God was not ashamed to be called their God: for he had prepared for them a city." The primitive Christians lived habitually in the same faith, in which the ancient patriarchs lived. Paul says, "We walk by faith, not by sight. For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Again he says to the Colossians, "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught." The first faith of Christians often inspired them with a fortitude, courage, and resolution, to fight the good fight of faith, and to overcome the world in all its seducing forms. But very soon their faith begins to lan-

guish, and the world see it, and gain an unhappy victory over them; and by sad experience, they are taught the absolute necessity of exercising a constant and persevering faith. The world are constant and uniform in opposing them, which constrains them to cry, "Lord, increase our faith." There is no discharge in the Christian warfare. The world have no thoughts of relinquishing their hostility to Christians, and therefore it behooves them to watch and pray without ceasing, that as their day is, so the strength of their faith may be, and that when they are weak, then they may be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

3. If it be by faith that Christians overcome the world, then they need to improve all the means of increasing their faith which God has appointed. He has promised to carry on the work of faith, which he has begun in their hearts, until the day of Jesus Christ. And he has told them, that it is by the means of grace that he will carry on the work of sanctification in their hearts. It is by the use of these means, that they may expect to grow in faith and every Christian grace. It becomes them, "as new-born babes, to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby." They ought to read the Bible constantly, seriously, and critically, that they may understand the precious doctrines and duties of the gospel, and the great and precious promises therein made to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. They ought to attend the public worship of God every Sabbath, and all the ordinances of the gospel in their appointed times. And they ought to give themselves to secret prayer, and devout meditations on spiritual and divine things. It is by the proper use of these means, that they gain those spiritual weapons which enable them to overcome the world. Hence the apostle exhorted the Ephesian Christians, "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth; and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and

watching thereunto with all perseverance." Believers now live in the same evil, hostile world that the primitive Christians did, and they need the same holy armor to overcome the world; and if they will only put it on, and wear it, they may feel themselves safe from all their spiritual enemies, whether visible or invisible: but if they neglect to use spiritual weapons, which God has put into their hands, they may expect to be wounded, if not destroyed.

4. If it be by faith that Christians overcome the world, then it is always owing to their unbelief, when the world overcome them. They are often slow of heart to believe what the Searcher of hearts has told them concerning the world. Christ said to his disciples, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you: if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." Paul says to the believers in Galatia, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." Solomon says, "An unjust man is an abomination to the just; and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked." All wicked men possess the spirit of Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away the deputy from the faith: and what his spirit was, Paul has told us. "Then Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" This spirit of enmity to the righteous, and to all righteousness, reigns in the heart of all the unbelieving world, and has been acted out in ten thousand instances. But Christians cannot easily realize that the world are all so bad as God has represented them to be. And one reason is, the world all walk in disguise, as much as possible, in order to deceive Christians, and to get the advantage of them. They profess to be friendly to them, and do a great many things that have the appearance of friendship. Sanballat and Tobias pretended to be friendly to Nehemiah, and to the cause he was pursuing in rebuilding the temple of the God of Israel. But their real intention was to defeat that great and good design. And had not Nehemiah believed the total depravity of the human heart, they would probably have

deceived him. It is through unbelief, therefore, that Christians so often suffer the world to overcome them. If they would be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves; if they would beware of the men of the world, they would neither fall into their hands, nor into their arms. When the men of the world perceive that Christians have a favorable opinion of them, they never fail to lead them, step by step, from the path of duty. O how much faith do Christians need at this day, in order to overcome the world; and in this place, especially! How many men of the world are there here, who put on a beautiful and amiable appearance, that would diffuse the spirit of the world, and promote the customs and manners of the world among Christians? They need to live by faith, watch and pray; and put on the whole armor of God, that they may stand in this evil day of declension.

5. If Christians may overcome the world by faith, then they never have any occasion to conform to the world. The great controversy between them and the world is, which shall conform to the other. The world always desire and endeavor to constrain or persuade Christians to conform to them, though they know that God has forbidden them to be conformed to the world. They are constantly and heartily engaged to gain the victory over Christians, and whenever they do gain the victory over one or more Christians, they exult and triumph. But if Christians would constantly live by faith, they would constantly gain the victory over the world, and constrain them to conform. The conquered must always be the conformists. Do we not see some individual Christians live so uniformly a life of faith, that they constrain all with whom they are connected and concerned, to be conformed to them, and pay homage to their faith and piety? And does not this more visibly appear, whenever God pours out his spirit in uncommon effusion, and enlivens the graces of Christians, and awakens and converts sinners? Christians then emphatically overcome the world, and the world are constrained to submit. The truth is, that if Christians would live by faith as they ought to live, and not conform to the world, the world would always conform to them. "The way of transgressors is hard." It was hard for Saul to oppose Christ and his faithful followers, and he was constrained to give up the contest, and accept the terms of peace proposed. Believers have a good cause to support, but unbelievers have a bad cause to support. And did believers always appear clad with the whole armor of God, unbelievers would give up their open controversy and flee into corners, and sue for peace.

6. It appears from what has been said, that Christians must

either overcome the world, or be overcome by the world. They must either live by faith as Noah did, and thereby condemn the world, or the world will condemn them. The world will always retain their hostile spirit towards Christians, and if they overcome them in one instance, they will redouble their exertions to overcome them in another and another, until they have brought them to an entire conformity to their spirit and conduct. The world will not consent to any compromise or terms of peace with Christians, so long as they cherish a hope that they shall overcome them. Christians, therefore, have only this alternative before them, to conquer, or to be conquered. If they neglect to put on their Christian armor for a day or an hour, the world will attack them, for they know that they can always overcome them, when they find them unarmed. Or I may say in plain terms, that when Christians lose their faith, they give the world an easy victory over them. If Christians disbelieve what God has told them of the men of the world, and view them as friendly and harmless, they may expect to suffer for their unbelief and presumption. But if they keep themselves clad with the "shield of faith," they may always overcome the world. If they live by faith in God, in Christ, and in the promises of the gospel, they may overcome the world as Christ overcame it, and become more than conquerors over all their spiritual enemies. And all the promises of the gospel are made to them that overcome and endure unto the end. They may run and not be weary, they may walk and not faint, and do all things through Christ strengthening them.

7. This subject now calls upon all, who have entertained a hope of being Christians, to inquire whether they are so, or not. And one way to determine this serious and interesting question is, to inquire whether they have overcome the world. This belongs to the essential character of every true believer. And here, perhaps, it is easier to determine who have not, than who have overcome the world. It is very evident, that those who once prayed in secret, and have neglected it; that once prayed in their families, and have neglected it; that once attended public worship, and have neglected it; that once came to the table of Christ, and have neglected it; and that once maintained an intimacy with the professed friends of Christ, but now, like Demas, have forsaken them,—it is evident that all such persons have not overcome the world, but conformed to them, and are claimed by them, and no longer resist the power and influence of those by whom they are overcome. Conquered Christians always yield the most free, voluntary, cheerful obedience and non-resistance to those who have overcome them.

Hence says the apostle to professors, "Know ye not, to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Now, let me ask Christians, do you believe that you have been for a long time gaining a greater and greater victory over the men of the world in this place? You must answer, no. Let me now ask the men of the world, do you not believe that you have for a long time been gaining a greater and greater victory over Christians in this place? You will readily answer, yes. It cannot be denied, then, that it seriously and deeply concerns the professors of religion here, to inquire whether their faith is not failing, and whether they are not overcome, instead of overcoming the world. All have need to make this inquiry, and some in particular, who have forsaken the Lord's side, and gone over to the enemy's camp. Though it is very difficult to bring home willing captives; yet if those who are strong in faith and clad with the whole armor of God should attempt it, they would have ground to hope for success. But be this as it may, let all sincere Christians be entreated to live in the constant exercise of faith. This is your duty, and the performance of this duty is your greatest safety and happiness, and your best preparation for leaving this militant state, and entering triumphantly into the state of everlasting peace and rest.

SERMON IV.

UNION IN THE CHURCH.

"THAT there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another."—1 Cor. xii. 25.

THE apostle in this chapter draws a parallel between the members of a Christian church and the members in the human body. He represents these as *naturally* connected for the use of the body, and the members of a church as *morally* connected for the benefit of that body. He beautifully describes the resemblance between these two bodies in various particulars. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." The whole of this beautiful and instructive allegory, which is descriptive of the Church and its members, naturally leads us to consider,

I. How the members of a Christian church become united.
II. Why they become united. And,
III. The importance of their maintaining their peculiar union.

I. We are to consider how the members of a church become united. Though they are as firmly united together as the members in the body, yet their union is not natural, but moral. For,

1. Every Christian church is, or ought to be, composed of lively stones, or those persons who have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life, and become true believers. They are renewed and sanctified before they become members of any particular, visible church. This was the case of the first converts after the resurrection of Christ. The three thousand converted on one day, professed their faith in Christ, and were baptized, but not received into any particular church. Men may now be converted, profess religion, and be baptized, without joining with any particular body of professed Christians. It is by *choice* that the subjects of saving grace unite together, and form themselves into a Christian church. A church is a Christian society, composed of those who choose to belong to it. The first Christian church was a voluntary society. None were compelled to join with it. Every proper, regular, Christian church is a voluntary society, and composed of those only who freely and voluntarily unite together. Though individuals may suppose themselves to be subjects of special grace, and profess to be so; yet if they neglect or refuse to join with any organized body of Christians, they do not belong to any visible church: or if they desire to join to any particular church, and they refuse to admit them to Christian communion and fellowship, they are not members of that particular church. For every particular church is a voluntary society, to which none can belong who do not choose to belong to it, and who are not admitted into it by the choice of the society.

2. The members of a Christian church become united by affection, as well as choice. They not only choose to be together, but choose to be together because they love one another with complacency and delight. They love one another not merely with benevolence, as men; but with complacency, as good men, who bear the moral image of God. They love one another, like David and Jonathan, as their own souls; or as David loved saints, whom he esteemed the excellent of the earth, and in whom was all his delight. Thus the first Christian church were cordially and mutually united in Christian love. "Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand

souls. And all that believed *were together.* And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart," perfectly united in brotherly love. All who possess the spirit of Christ love one another with pure and permanent complacency, because they appear to one another as having the same mind in them that was also in Christ Jesus. The brotherly love of Christians is the strongest bond of union that can exist between them. It is that pure, disinterested love which is as strong as death, and which many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown. Such pure complacency and delight in each other, lead the members of a Christian church to form into a distinct society, and unite together in Christian fellowship and communion. The members of a Christian church are connected by stronger, firmer, and more indissoluble ties, than any other society on earth. They have one heart and one interest, which nothing in the universe can sever. A Christian church is built on a firmer foundation than the rocks and the mountains, which may be broken or wear away. It is built on the Rock of Ages. "Now, therefore," says the apostle to the church of Ephesus, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

3. A Christian church is not only united by choice and affection, but also by a solemn mutual covenant. They mutually covenant and engage to aid and assist one another in their Christian course; to watch over each other for their spiritual benefit; to attend the worship of God and the ordinances of the gospel together; and to submit to that government which Christ has instituted for the peace, purity, and edification of the whole Church collectively. Thus every Christian church is composed of members, who by choice, by affection, and by covenant, bind themselves to walk together in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord, blameless. Let us now consider,

II. Why the members of a church form themselves into such a distinct and confederated body. It must be supposed, that they act very deliberately and conscientiously in this solemn transaction, and under the influence of pious and weighty

motives. And this will appear, if we consider the several purposes for which they associate together.

1. It is for the purpose of attending the public and stated preaching of the gospel. This is one of the duties of the Sabbath, and a branch of public worship, which as Christians they are required to observe. Christ preached on the Sabbath. The apostles preached on the Sabbath, and the primitive Christians did not forsake the assembling of themselves together on that day. The stated preaching of the gospel is one of the means of grace, which Christ instituted for the instruction and edification of the Church. Accordingly, the apostle tells us, "He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The men of the world were not pleased with the preaching of Christ, nor the preaching of the apostles, nor are they better pleased with it at the present day, though there are now some pleasing circumstances attending it, which frequently draw them together at the place of public worship. But still they all neglect or refuse to bind themselves to attend statedly and constantly. But real Christians desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. They therefore solemnly bind themselves to attend the public worship of God, and statedly hear the instructions of his word together, in order to promote their mutual edification and growth in grace. They dare not trust their own hearts, but lay themselves under solemn vows to discharge this religious duty for their mutual benefit.

2. They associate together for the purpose of attending divine ordinances, which are appointed for them exclusively. The preaching of the gospel is a divine ordinance, but not appointed for Christians in particular. All men are allowed to attend it, if they please, and it is designed for their spiritual and eternal good. But baptism and the Lord's supper are sacred ordinances, designed to promote the union, peace, harmony, and edification of Christians in particular. They are to be administered in public, and to professors of religion only. They are properly social ordinances, and designed to promote social affections, or Christian communion. They are not generally to be administered in private, and in that manner only on extraordinary occasions. It is, therefore, of peculiar importance, that the members of a church should constantly attend the sacrament, to hold communion with one another, as well

as with Christ. The ordinance is in its own nature social, and requires the communicants to exercise brotherly love and Christian communion. This is one weighty reason why they should lay themselves under the bonds of a covenant to meet together at the same place, to celebrate the memorials of Christ's death. By coming together in the exercise of brotherly love, they discharge a duty which they owe not only to Christ and to themselves, but to one another.

3. They associate and confederate together, for the purpose of doing honor to the religion they profess. By coming out from the world, forming a society different from all other societies, and for promoting a cause infinitely more important than any other human societies are formed to promote, they bear a public testimony in favor of the truth and importance of Christianity. They show that they are not ashamed of the cross of Christ, nor to name his name, nor to follow his example, nor to obey his precepts and commands, in the face of a frowning world. They become the salt of the earth, and light of the world, and practically condemn the world for their impenitence and unbelief. They are free, voluntary, active instruments of diffusing religious knowledge and vital piety, and of carrying into execution the purposes of God in the government and redemption of the world. They are the enlisted soldiers of Christ, and protectors of the church militant. They are an army with banners, and carry terror to the enemies of truth. They are "the church of the living God, the *pillar and ground* of the truth." They are the repository of the Oracles of God. Had it not been for the visible church, the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament had long since been lost. The enemies of truth have always supposed, that if they could destroy the Church, they could destroy the Bible, and banish Christianity from the earth. But though the Church has often been a small body, yet by its indissoluble union, it has always been a very powerful and formidable body, and able to resist and overcome all opposition, and preserve itself. The members of a Christian church have always had in view great and glorious objects, and never failed of being more or less successful in attaining them, by their confederated union. There are good reasons, therefore,

III. Why they should maintain union of affections and exertions. For,

1. This is necessary to prevent any such thing as schism from rising up and producing its dire effects in a church. Though heresy and schism are nearly allied, and often prove the cause and effect of each other; yet very similar and perni-

cious consequences flow from both. Heresy consists in erroneous sentiments, and schism consists in bitter animosity, contention, and separation in a church. When the members of the body are disjointed or obstructed in their natural operations, it produces acute pain, or extreme anguish in the body. Solomon says, "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint." But heresy or schism in the body of a church is a far more painful and dangerous evil. It creates discords, animosities, contentions, divisions, and separations, which counteract all the pious and important purposes for which the church is formed. It deeply concerns the members of a church to guard against, and if possible, to prevent such moral maladies rising up and spreading among them. And the only effectual remedy they can employ is the cultivation of mutual affection, or brotherly love, which will produce a sympathy and cement that will hold them together. For this cause, the duty of Christian union is so repeatedly and solemnly enjoined upon them. This is enjoined upon them in the text to prevent schism. "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another." Again the apostle says in this same epistle, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind." Again he says to the Philippians, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." And the apostle Peter says to Christians, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." It highly behooves the members of a church to love as brethren; and so long as brotherly love continues, there is no danger of heresy or schism breaking out among them. While united in brotherly love, they will be joined together in the same mind, embrace the same doctrines, repel the same errors, discountenance the same discord, animosity, contentions, divisions, and separations, and strive together to promote the peace and purity of the church. The tendency of brotherly love to promote such great and desirable objects is a powerful reason why the members of a church should constantly maintain it; especially since it is so solemnly enjoined upon them.

2. It is of great importance, that the members of a church

should cherish and maintain union and affection, in order to enjoy Christian communion, in attending public worship and the special ordinances of the gospel. It is one, if not the principal object they profess to have in view, in becoming members of the church, to hold Christian communion and fellowship together in attending divine ordinances. But without union they can have no spiritual communion or enjoyment. They may walk together to the house of God in company, and sit together at the table of Christ; but if they are alienated in their affections towards one another, they cannot enjoy Christian communion, or have spiritual enjoyment. Says the apostle to the Corinthians, among whom he had heard there were discords and contentions, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Again he says in the same epistle, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." "Now in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you: and I partly believe it." The men of the world may unite together in the pursuit of worldly objects, and gain the objects of their pursuit, without brotherly love or union and affection. But the members of a Christian church cannot obtain one of their principal objects, unless they are cordially united, and love as brethren. This the apostle Peter knew, and therefore said to Christians in general, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren." As there is nothing more necessary to the union and communion, peace and harmony, edification and happiness of a church, than brotherly love; so it is of the highest importance, that all its members should constantly cherish and maintain this Christian grace. Besides,

3. Their own honor and usefulness, as a church, depend upon their maintaining and exhibiting that union of affection, upon which it is founded. Those that are without, are very critical and severe observers of those that are within the pale of the church. And there is no one mark by which they judge of the reality of religion and the sincerity of Christians, more fre-

quently than by their union or disunion among themselves. The heathen remarked to the honor of the primitive Christians, "See how they love one another!" But the men of the world have more generally and reproachfully remarked, "See how heresies, schisms, contentions, and even persecutions have prevailed among the professed followers of the Prince of Peace." It cannot be denied, that Christians have too often given ground for such severe reproaches. But they ought to avoid them as much as lieth in them. And by maintaining that union of affection, which both their duty and profession require, they may convince the world that they have that union of affection, which Christ prayed the Father to give them. Having prayed for his disciples in particular, he prayed for all his future followers. "Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." So ardently did Christ pray for union of affection among his followers, for the sake of their convincing the world, that they were united in love, as he and his Father were united, that his Father loved them as he had loved him, and that the world might believe and know, that he had come to seek and save them that are lost. Union of affection in a church is the highest evidence that it is a *Christian* church, and the existence of a Christian church is the highest visible evidence to the world, that God has sent his Son into the world; that he has suffered and died, and established a religion superior to any other religion ever devised or practised by mankind. It is only by cherishing and maintaining brotherly love among themselves, that the members of a church can convince the world they are sincere, and that the religion they profess is a divine reality.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the origin, nature, and design of a Christian church, that it is Congregational. It is composed of members, who freely associate and confederate together, to meet together statedly for religious purposes and Christian communion and edification. This was the foundation of all the primi-

tive churches. All the churches organized by the apostles were strictly congregational, and consisted of such members only as of choice and of affection bound themselves together for the purpose of attending the worship of God and the ordinances of the gospel. But immediately after the death of the apostles, different opinions rose up, with respect to the extent of a Christian church. Some supposed that it ought to consist of more than one body of Christians, that could meet together in one place. They first formed a Presbyterian church, composed of a number of individual churches and their pastors. These pastors, together with delegates from their several churches, formed into a presbytery, and agreed to submit to the watch, and care, and government of that ecclesiastical body. Next they enlarged their presbytery into a diocese, and submitted to the watch, and care, and government of a single Bishop at the head of a single diocese. They were not, however, contented with their diocesan church, but wished to form one universal church, under one supreme, visible Head. This they did ages ago, and in consequence of it, the Pope has ever since to this day, claimed the government of the universal visible church. But all these innovations are departures from the original form, design, and extent of the first Christian church in Jerusalem. The apostles followed the directions of Christ, and gathered none but Congregational churches. And had Christians followed the example of the apostles, they would have prevented some of the greatest evils and calamities that have ever fallen on the Christian world. Had churches continued Congregational, they could never have introduced the corruptions, idolatries, and usurpations of the church of Rome, nor raised up such a man as the Pope, to spread error, delusion, idolatry, tyranny, and persecution through Christian countries.

2. Since every Christian church is a free, voluntary society, it is in its own nature absolutely independent. The members of every individual church have a right to attend public worship and the ordinances of the gospel, agreeably to the word of God, and the dictates of their own consciences. They have a right to choose their own teachers, to regulate their own modes and forms of conducting their public worship, and of judging and deciding in respect to any controversies or difficulties arising among them. They have a right to claim independence, and to act independently of every other church or body of men in the world, in their religious concerns. They may ask advice of other churches, and either follow or reject it, according to their own judgment. Every church is completely independent, and has no right to give up its independence. This was the

opinion of the first ministers and churches in New England, and for a time they strictly acted according to this opinion. But they gradually altered their opinion and practice, till some became Presbyterians, and some Episcopalians. The clergy have been the most influential in bringing about these innovations. The cause is obvious. Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism throw more power into the hands of ministers than Congregationalism. The late union between the General Associations of New England and the General Assembly of Philadelphia, has led many who were Congregational ministers and churches to become Presbyterian. But they are stepping on unscriptural and dangerous ground. All Congregational churches ought to open their eyes, and guard against all means and measures that are used to introduce an ecclesiastical hierarchy in this country.

3. It appears from the nature and design of a Christian Congregational church, that every member ought to submit to the watch, and care, and government of the body to which he has chosen to belong. He united freely and voluntarily, and placed confidence in the wisdom, affection, and faithfulness of the members of the church; and can he have more reason to think, when they watch over him, rebuke him, or even censure him, that they have generally lost their Christian character, than that he has acted inconsistently with his, and deserved to be admonished, or censured? They may, indeed, judge and act wrong; but, in that case, their judgment and conduct is to be respected and revered, and not reproached. Every church is more apt to be lax than severe in watching over its members. And individuals, perhaps, suffer more by its laxness, than its severity or injustice.

4. It appears from the nature and profession of a Christian church, that every member ought to seek the good of the civil society to which he belongs. Every member of a Christian church is also a member of the civil society to which he belongs, and in which he enjoys civil privileges. His obligations to the church do not weaken, but strengthen, his obligations to the civil society to which he belongs. But the primitive Christians imbibed an opinion, that their Christian character, profession, and obligations, weakened, if not dissolved, their obligations as members of civil society; and this subjected them to the just reproach of the heathen among whom they lived. The apostle Peter reproved them for their false opinion, and their unruly conduct founded upon it. Hear what he says on the subject. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having

your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you, as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." Civil laws allow men to do many things which Christian laws forbid. Civil laws allow men, in a thousand ways, to show disrespect and contempt to kings, princes, and all in civil authority, which is really injurious to civil society, and obstructing the benefits which arise from good government. But the members of a Christian church have no right to abuse their civil liberty, and do things that their civil liberty allows them to do, to injure the civil society to which they belong. They ought to act as the servants of God, and do all the good they can to the civil society to which they belong.

5. Since the members of a Christian church are united by choice, affection, and covenant, it must be wrong for any of them to do anything which has a tendency to injure the whole church to which they belong. Their criminality in doing wrong is in proportion to their obligations to do right: and their obligations to do right are extremely strong. They have been admitted into the best society in the world. They profess to love as brethren, and to care each one for another, as for himself. They have bound themselves, by a solemn covenant, to seek each other's spiritual and eternal good. They have mutually engaged to meet one another in the house of God, and to sit together and hold communion with one another at the table of Christ. The benefits they have received from one another, by virtue of their Christian connection, have drawn the bands of brotherly love closer and closer, and added weight to all their other obligations to seek the good of the whole fraternity to which they belong. If under these circumstances and obligations, any of the members do anything to wound, weaken, and injure the whole body, it must be very wrong indeed. In particular, it must be very wrong for any of the members to neglect Family Prayer, which is one article in the covenant upon which this church* was founded.

* Church in Franklin.

In the original covenant to which all the members subscribed their names with their own hands, they mutually engaged to read the scriptures and attend social prayers in their families every day. For any to deny or neglect this duty, then, has a tendency to wound the feelings, weaken the hands, and dishonor the whole church to which they belong. And can this be a small injury to the body for which they have bound themselves to feel and express a tender and faithful concern?

To neglect attending the stated public worship of God in his house, is injurious to the whole body of the church. It is neglecting public worship in those who are able to attend, and have nothing to hinder their attendance but mere disinclination. But how contrary it is to the professed character of a Christian to indulge a disinclination to the public worship of God, and how disheartening and wounding to the friends of Christ! Those who neglect it, weaken, dishonor, and grieve the whole church.

Those injure the whole body of their brethren, who neglect to attend the sacrament of the Lord's supper. That is emphatically a day of communion, when all the members of the church are expected and desired to meet together to commune with Christ and one another, and anticipate their future and eternal communion. To neglect attendance on such a solemn occasion for a trivial cause, or no cause at all but mere distaste and aversion to the gospel feast, argues an unchristian spirit in the neglecters, and casts a visible reproach upon the whole church, which is aggravatedly criminal.

Those who neglect to attend public worship and divine ordinances in their own church, and join in worship and communion in some other church, from a motive of convenience, or from a spirit of disaffection to their own church, violate their covenant, and do a very great injury to the church to which they properly belong. They set an example, which, if their brethren should follow, would ruin any church in the world.

Those are verily guilty of injuring the whole church, who imbibe and propagate false and dangerous doctrines among its members, as well as those who create schisms, contentions, divisions, and separations. These disturb the peace, the union, the harmony, the communion, the edification, the general growth and prosperity of the church. The uncommon prevalence of heresies and schisms at the present day in the church of Christ, threatens alarming consequences, and unless it can be restrained, must spread spiritual desolation through the land. How many once numerous, peaceful, flourishing churches are now diminishing, languishing, and dying! The authors

and fomenters of schisms and heresies contract a heavy load of guilt, and, unless they repent, will fall into the pit they are digging for others. But those who are doing the greatest injuries to a church in general, often employ so much secrecy, art, and deception, that they are not discovered until it is too late. The little leaven that begins to work spreads so gradually that it is little regarded, until many are leavened, and the whole body of the church becomes so corrupted, weakened, and discouraged, that they can make no effectual resistance. If one member personally injures or offends another, the offended is very apt to complain to the church, and seek redress. But offences against the whole body of the church but little affect individuals, whose love of union is grown old; and soon none can be found with love, and courage, and zeal enough, to bring enemies of the church in general to a sense of their guilt and duty.

SERMON V.

TRUE CHURCH FORMIDABLE TO THE WORLD.

"And terrible as an army with banners."—Solomon's Song, vi. 10.

is book contains a familiar dialogue between Christ and hurch; in which the Church expresses her supreme affec- o Christ, and he in return expresses the beauty and ex- ce of the Church. In our text, it is Christ who speaks, displays the glory and formidable dignity of the Church. o is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the , clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" rmy is a very formidable object, especially an army drawn battle array, with banners or flags flying. Christ, we presume, would not represent his Church under this e figure, without sufficient reason. And the plain and ns reason is, that the Church on earth is surrounded by rous enemies, and placed in a militant state. It is ed to oppose the world, who are opposed to God, and to friends of God. Hence, the Church on earth is often dis- uished from the Church in heaven, by the appellation of hurch *militant*. All who belong to the true Church are e Lord's side, espouse his cause, and stand opposed to a l lying in wickedness. On this account, Christ represents hurch as equipped, and prepared to defend themselves st their unreasonable and malignant enemies. Hence, ay justly conclude,

at the true Church is formidable to the world.

hall first describe the true Church, and then show why it midable to the world.

I am to describe the true Church. This word is used in ns senses in scripture. It sometimes signifies a single ty or congregation of visible saints. It sometimes signi-

fies all the visible saints in every part of the world. And it sometimes signifies all real saints among all religious denominations. These are emphatically the true Church, in distinction from all the rest of the world. There are real saints, it is to be hoped, among most of those, who have assumed different names or denominations in the visible Church; and all who are supremely attached to God and his cause, compose the true Church on earth. These, though widely scattered in different and distant parts of the world, are in reality one body, and united by the strong and tender ties of mutual affection, which never shall be broken. They are all children of one Father. They are all brethren, and love as brethren. They are all citizens of Zion, and belong to the general assembly and Church of the first-born in heaven. I now proceed to show,

II. That this true church is formidable to the world; or "terrible as an army with banners." Though the world pretend to despise the Church, yet the Church is really a formidable body of men, and sometimes appear so to their enemies. But why?

1. Because the Church are *heartily* opposed to the world. There is a direct contrariety between the friends and enemies of God, or between the Church and the rest of mankind. The Church are born after the Spirit, but the world are born after the flesh. These are mutually opposed to each other. Accordingly, Solomon says, "An unjust man is an abomination to the just; and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked." This representation is confirmed by Christ. He says to his true followers, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The true Church have affections and interests, which are diametrically opposite to the affections and interests of the world. And David, in the name of the Church, has expressed their genuine feelings towards the world of the ungodly. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies." This is the language of the true Church. Their hearts are opposed to the hearts of the world. They are not merely nominal enemies to the enemies of God, but real and hearty enemies to them. And it is this sincere, internal opposition to the world, which renders them truly formidable. The world care very little for nominal enemies, but they dread those who oppose them in their hearts. The Church are always heartily opposed

to the world, though they do not always equally manifest it. But whenever their duty requires them to manifest their feelings towards the world, they manifest the same feelings that Christ manifested towards the enemies of God, and that Paul manifested towards Simon the sorcerer. And such pious, Christian feelings of the Church, make them appear terrible as an army with banners to the ungodly world.

2. The true Church are formidable in their opposition to the world, because their opposition is *just*. The world are opposed to the Church without any just cause. The true Church are holy and harmless. They are the excellent of the earth. They bear the image of their Maker, and possess the spirit of their Saviour. "They look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun," and "beautiful as Tirzah." They are worthy of the love and esteem of the world. But the men of the world are unholy in their hearts and in their lives, and unworthy of the complacence of God and of all holy beings. They have a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. They are enemies to all righteousness, and opposed to the holiness and happiness of the universe. Hence, the Church are obliged in justice to be opposed to the world. They cannot do otherwise, without becoming enemies to God. They oppose the world upon the same ground upon which God opposes them. And this renders their opposition to the enemies of God truly formidable. They know that all good men ought to oppose them, and of consequence that their opposition is altogether just. Whenever they look at the true Church as real friends to God, they look upon them as justly united in their opposition to all who are heartily opposed to the greatest and best of beings. The opposition of the Church would, indeed, be weak and contemptible, were it not just, and the world might disregard and despise it. But since the opposition of the Church is founded in justice, and flows from pure love to God and the good of the universe, it is truly terrible, and the whole world have reason to tremble at it.

3. The true Church are *numerous*, and on that account their opposition to the world is formidable. It is true, indeed, that there have been times when the Church have been comparatively few in numbers. They were so from Adam to Abraham, and from Abraham to Moses, and sometimes from Moses to Christ; but at the deepest declension, when Elijah thought they were well nigh extinguished, God, who knew all his friends, assured him there were then seven thousand in Israel, who were attached to his cause, and opposed to his enemies. When the Church came out of the wilderness and entered into Ca-

naan, they were very numerous, and amounted to hundreds of thousands. And though they afterwards diminished from time to time, yet a precious remnant continued until the coming of Christ. And after his resurrection, when he sent down his Spirit in copious effusions, the Church increased with great rapidity. In one day three thousand were added to the Church. After this, the apostles took various courses, and carried the gospel far and wide among both Jews and Gentiles, so that before the apostles had left the world, the Church of Christ became very numerous. Peter, in his general epistle to Christians, mentions those who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. This implies, that the Christian Church had spread far beyond the bounds of Judea, and included vast multitudes of real Christians. From that day to this, the gospel has been carried almost round the world, and its converts have been immensely multiplied. And though religion has greatly declined of late, in some places, it has greatly revived in others; and there is reason to believe, that many thousands, if not millions, of real Christians are now living in Asia, Europe, and America. The true Church are now formidable in respect to numbers. Though they bear a small proportion to the world of mankind, yet, collectively considered, they are an exceedingly large army, cordially united and completely clad with every spiritual weapon. And could the Church militant be martialed together, they would strike terror to the whole world, that lies in wickedness and rebellion against their righteous and injured Sovereign, on account of their numbers. The Church of God once appeared in this formidable attitude, and then they marched through nation after nation, and struck terror into the minds of all their enemies. The army of Israel, passing from Egypt to Canaan, made the world tremble. And the Church of God now, though destitute of carnal weapons, is as terrible as an army with banners to those, who view them as their just and determined foes, clad with spiritual weapons, which are mighty through God to conquer all opposition.

4. The true Church are entirely *united* in their opposition to those who are in a state of rebellion against God, which makes them formidable to the world. Though the members of the Church may belong to different denominations, and wear different badges; though they belong to different nations and speak different languages; and though they may be so widely dispersed, that they cannot come together in one place; yet they are all present in spirit, united in affection, and act in concert in opposing all who oppose God. There is not one dissentient

upon the subject of opposition. Though they differ on other points, yet on this they are universally agreed. They have all drunk into one spirit. They are all of one heart and soul. They all possess the spirit of Christ. They are all partakers of the divine nature. They all love holiness, and hate sin. They all love God, and hate his enemies. So that they are all united in their views, desires, and exertions to promote the kingdom of God, and to oppose all who oppose that great and important object. Could all the real friends of God come together, and express their feelings, they would all speak the same thing, and declare their holy and hearty opposition to everything hostile to the interests of Zion. Now, if the true Church be numerous as individuals, and if they are all united in opposing the world, their opposition must be formidable. Union gives strength to any body or society of men. And union in a good cause, and upon just ground, is the most powerful kind of union. This is the life and strength of the true Church. Their union is permanent, being founded in immutable principles. They know, that nothing can dissolve or destroy it. But the union of the world can easily be destroyed. They are, indeed, actually disunited in heart, and in the pursuit of their ultimate object. They all seek their own, not one another's good, nor the glory of God. Hence, the union of the true Church is very alarming to those, who are conscious that they are not united among themselves. The united Church against a disunited world feel strong and courageous, and inflexibly determined in their opposition. They never mean to retreat, but are resolved to persist in opposing a rebellious world. They live in lively hopes, that the world will be broken and divided, and that their own union will be more and more connected and strengthened. This inspires them with a resolution, courage, and zeal, which carry terror and dismay to a disunited, inconsistent, and self-condemned world.

5. The true Church are not only united among themselves, in their opposition to the world, but they have very numerous and powerful allies, who are united with them in the same cause. The Church militant have all the Church triumphant in cordial alliance with them. The whole number of those who have been sanctified and admitted into the kingdom of glory, are heartily united with the Church on earth. They all wish well to their opposition to the world, and possibly may afford them some real, though invisible, assistance. But if the spirits of just men made perfect cannot afford them any personal assistance, yet all the angels of heaven are allied with them, and constantly employed in affording them aid in their opposition. They are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs

of salvation. These powerful allies attended the Church through the wilderness, and through the whole period of the Mosaic dispensation. They sometimes appeared in visible forms, and did wonders in aiding the Church in days of danger, and giving them victory over their invading enemies. And though they have not, since the gospel day, very often made their visible appearance, yet we are assured that they are still attached to the Church, and employed in opposing those who oppose them. The numbers of saints and angels in heaven are immensely great. Their power, wisdom, and goodness are equal to their numbers. The Church militant carry on their opposition to the world in alliance with all the hosts of heaven. So that they may confidently say, as Elisha did on a certain occasion, "They that be with us, are more than they that be with them," who rise up against us. This is a very consoling and animating consideration to the Church, and no less alarming to those who confide in their numbers to bear down the little flock of Christ. Did the world only realize the numerous and powerful allies of the Church, their hearts would fail them, and they would despair of gaining the victory over the friends of God.

6. The true Church are furnished with the most impenetrable and irresistible armor. It is true, the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. These, however, are the most effectual against a sinful and opposing world. They preserve the Church from harm, while they send the most deadly arrows into the hearts of their enemies. We find the armor of the Church described with great particularity, in the sixth of Ephesians. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication." Men fortified with *truth* and *righteousness;* with *faith* and *prayer;* and with the *word* and *spirit of God*, must be very formidable to a world destitute of all these spiritual and powerful weapons; and they appeared so, when the Church militant were marching to Canaan, clad in the whole armor of God. While they carried the ark before them, which contained the *word of God;* while they carried

truth, and *righteousness*, and *holiness to the Lord*, inscribed in capitals on their breast; and while Moses and Aaron were praying always, with all prayer and supplication, the armies of Amalek, the walls of Jericho, and all the nations of Canaan, fell or fled before them. And though the true Church are not now collected in a body, yet they are all covered over with their spiritual armor, and equally prepared to carry death and ruin into the camp of their spiritual enemies, who presume to oppose and obstruct them in their way to the heavenly Canaan.

7. The true Church always have the presence of God with them, in their opposition to the world. As God approves of their opposition, so he always affords them his aid in carrying it on. This was visibly and gloriously apparent under the Mosaic dispensation. Then he constantly attended his Church with visible tokens of his power and protection. He dwelt in the pillar of cloud and of fire. And this pillar moved before the Church, from the time they left Egypt, until they safely arrived in the land of promise. From this pillar he issued his orders, directed their steps, and dispensed his aid from time to time. He never left them a single day, or a single moment; though once, for their disobedience, he threatened to forsake them. But Moses stood in the gap, and successfully interceded for them. He said to God, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." God heard his petition, and graciously replied, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." The same gracious and powerful presence of God still attends his people, though it does not appear so visibly to them and to the world. Christ has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." God manifested his gracious presence with his Church, on the day of Pentecost, by the great and glorious effects he produced on that extraordinary occasion. God still dwells in Zion; for he hath chosen it for his habitation. And this gracious, though invisible, presence of God with his Church, renders their opposition to the world terrible as an army with banners.

8. God has promised to give his Church a complete victory over all his and their enemies. He has promised that his Church shall increase in numbers, in holiness, and in strength. He has promised to "give the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, to the people of the saints of the Most High." He has promised to make Zion the joy and praise of the whole earth. And he has commanded his Church to pray for the fulfilment of these great and precious promises. While they pray, they hope; and the

hope of victory always inspires an army with courage and confidence. This is the case with the Church of God, in their opposition to the world. They know that they shall finally prevail, and gain their object. And since the world know that they possess this hope and confidence, they appear like an army with banners, and carry consternation to all who are fighting against God.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since the Church are so powerful and irresistible in their opposition to the world, it is strange that the world have been no more sensible of their weakness and impotence in contending with the Church. They have always been extremely bold and presumptuous, in opposing and endeavoring to destroy the Church, and have been very confident, that they should finally prevail and conquer. David has repeatedly described their violent opposition, and presumptuous confidence. He demands, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." Again, he says, "Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. They break down the carved work thereof at once, with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together." "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof." This has always been the language and practice of the world. They have felt and acted out their enmity and opposition to the Church in all ages. They violently opposed the ancient patriarchs, until there was but one pious family left. The Egyptians opposed and attempted to destroy the Church, while they continued among them. The seven nations of Canaan attempted to destroy them, while passing through the wilderness. The nations round about Judea often invaded and endeavored to destroy them. The Assyrians and Babylonians often attacked and plundered them, and finally carried most of them into perpetual captivity. And since the establishment of the Christian Church, all nations have been using all their art and influence to corrupt and destroy them. But the Church have always been like an army with banners, terrible and destructive to all

their enemies. The patriarchal Church destroyed an ungodly world. The Mosaic Church destroyed the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians. The Christian Church has proved the ruin of the Grecians and Romans, and well nigh of the French and Spaniards, who have all in their turn manifested a cruel and persecuting spirit towards the Church of Christ. God has always appeared in favor of his Church, and displayed his wrath and indignation against all the nations of the earth, for their enmity and opposition to the children of Zion. It is strange, therefore, that the world have not long ago been convinced of the folly and danger, as well as criminality of opposing the Church, who have all holy beings on their side, and are armed with powerful and irresistible weapons. The world have always been infatuated, when they have openly and violently opposed the Church. It is expressly said, that God hardened the hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that they might pursue the Israelites to their own destruction. And it is expressly said, that God hardened the hearts of the nations, who came out in battle against Joshua and the Israelites in the wilderness, that they might be destroyed. And while the king of Babylon meant to cut off and destroy the Church, God meant that the Church should destroy him. God has continually been infatuating the nations of the earth, hardening their hearts, and awakening their opposition to his people, cause, and kingdom, to prepare them for their merited condemnation and doom. The late combinations in Europe against Christ and his Church, have brought upon the conspirators the most tremendous and desolating judgments. The conspirators against the Church were infatuated to ruin themselves. And still the world are so stupid as to despise and oppose the Church, who always have been, and always will be, under God, too mighty for their enemies.

2. If the true Church are so powerful and irresistible, as has been shown, then it argues extreme folly and guilt in the men of the world to oppose the true Church under the pretence of opposing the false Church. This has been the conduct of the world. They have generally allowed that God has a true Church, composed of his cordial friends. And these they acknowledge are truly amiable, and worthy of universal approbation and esteem. But they say there is a false Church, composed of the vilest of the human race, who, under the pretence of piety and virtue, deceive and injure all who have any concern with them. The world never pretend to oppose good men, but only bad men. They never pretend to oppose true religion, but only false. The men of the world opposed, perse-

cuted, and put to death the Puritans in England, under pretence of opposing false professors and false religion. And the conspirators against Christian professors in France pretended to oppose, persecute, and destroy them for their errors and delusions, and hypocrisy, but not for their piety. And all the opposition that the men of the world now feel and express towards professors of religion, they pretend to feel and express towards false professors and false religion. They do not presume to call all religion in question, nor to oppose all professors, but only the insincere and hypocritical. This, however, is not true. For the true Church, composed of pious members, is the only Church that is formidable to the world, and really excites their enmity and opposition. The false Church, composed of false professors, are really of the world, and the world always love their own, and approve of them, instead of opposing them. The world are enemies only to Christ and his true followers. These they justly view as opposed to them, and unitedly engaged to pull down the kingdom of darkness to which they belong, and the strongholds in which they endeavor to guard themselves against the spiritual and deadly weapons of the true Church. But the true Church have a spiritual discerning of their concealed enmity and opposition to them. They have once been in their camp, heard their language, and united in their conspiracy against Christ and his friends. They know whom they really aim at, in all their acts of hostility against the gospel and the professors of the gospel. And Christ, the captain of their salvation, knows, infinitely better, all their inward views, and feelings, and designs, in all they say and do against himself and his true followers. Though they pretend to oppose none but impostors and false professors, and deceivers; yet he knows that all their hostility is aimed and pointed against the true Church, and its Head, and members. Paul, when he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, pretended to oppose none but Christ as an impostor, and his followers as insincere and false professors of true religion. But Christ knew Paul better than he knew himself, and charges him with mortal enmity against him and his sincere friends. When he met him going to Damascus, he accosted him and condemned him in this solemn and cutting manner: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" It is in vain for the world to pretend, that they opposed only a false Church and false professors; for Christ, who feels and resents all that is done against his sincere followers, knows that he and they are the real objects of the world's hatred and opposition; and he will treat his and their

enemies, according to their malevolent feelings and conduct. There is reason to fear that there are multitudes at this day, who are opposing true religion and the true professors of it, under a fatal delusion, that they are only opposing a false religion and its false professors.

3. If the true Church are powerful and irresistible, then the world have reason to be afraid of opposing them, when they are most diminished and weakened, in respect to numbers. Though their own numbers are sometimes small and weak, yet their allies are numerous and powerful. The Church in their lowest state have God and all holy beings on their side, engaged to assist and protect them. God, speaking of the Church, which he calls his vineyard, says, "I, the Lord, do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." It is as dangerous to the world, to oppose the true Church at one time, as at another, and they are as unable to hurt, or destroy it, at one time, as at another. The world are often so infatuated, as to imagine, that when the Church is small, it is weak, and can be easily, safely, and successfully opposed; but this is a great delusion. The Church are always strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. When the Church consisted of but one family, the world could not destroy it. When it was but a small remnant, in Isaiah's day, the world could not destroy it. When it crept into corners, for fear of the Jews, the world could not destroy it. It has never been so small and so weak, but it has been powerful and terrible as an army with banners to the world. God has always made the Church as numerous and powerful as he pleased. And there is reason to believe, that whenever he has reduced their numbers and strength, it has been for the purpose of infatuating their enemies, and leading them into a controversy with Zion, that they might be confounded and destroyed. What if the Church be reduced to a handful, in different places? God is able to enlarge and strengthen it at any time, and to any degree he pleases. The world have no reason to rejoice and triumph in their opposition. They are only preparing the way for their own overthrow, and the final triumph of the Church. The Lord has always appeared in his glory in building up Zion, when his servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof. It is unbelief in the Church to despond in their lowest and weakest state; and presumption in the world to oppose them in that condition. It is as difficult, and dangerous, and hopeless in the world, to oppose the Church at one time, as at another.

4. If the true Church be truly powerful and formidable, then

there are no neuters in respect to them. Many in the world, who belong to the world, desire to be neutral to the Church. They do not desire to join with the Church, nor to oppose the Church; and some, no doubt, persuade themselves, that they neither love nor hate, neither favor nor oppose the Church, but feel very indifferent whether the Church should be multiplied, or diminished, and whether they should grow stronger or weaker. But this betrays great ignorance of their own hearts, and forgetfulness of their past feelings. Who that have lived in a time of a revival of religion, have not sensibly felt opposition to religion, and to those who hopefully experienced it? And are there any now, that are in a state of nature, who feel indifferent whether God shall appear again in his glory in building up Zion? Do not the present Church, small as they are, appear as formidable as an army with banners? And do any who are not of their number, desire that their number and strength should increase? If they would only consult their own hearts, they would find them *for*, or *against* the Church, and not entertain a doubt on which side they are. God allows of no neuters. The true Church allow of none; and those who do not belong to the true Church are conscious that they are not neuters. The whole world are divided into two great armies, who are determined to overcome each other. Some are leaders, and some are followers, on both sides. The former hold the most conspicuous place, and act the most conspicuous parts. The leaders on both sides oppose each other, more than others, who are not so conspicuous and active. But the most inactive feel more or less interest in the contest between the Church and the world, and often stand ready, when especially called upon, to afford their assistance to those, who are pursuing the object which they ultimately desire should be obtained. God enrolls all men, either *with* his Church or *against* his Church, and they must all ere long be constrained to answer to their names, and take their proper rank. They are yet at liberty to put down their names upon which roll they will. But if they misplace their names, God will rectify their mistake, which will afford joy, or extreme sorrow and anguish of heart. You have this day been called upon to take your proper places, but some of you may have grossly erred. God has given you directions plain enough, and if you have either misunderstood, or disregarded his directions, the blame is yours, and you must abide the serious consequences.

5. If the true Church are so powerful and irresistible, as they have been represented, then there is no danger in openly and sincerely joining with the Church. The Church are the only

body of men on earth, that are perfectly safe in this evil and dangerous world. And none are safe but those who heartily unite with them. Why then are there so many, who think and say, that they are friendly to the Church, but yet fear to have their names enrolled with them? Is it not because they are slow of heart to believe, that the Church are so strong and so terrible to the world as the Bible represents? This is wrong and inexcusable.

Finally, let all inquire whether they are friends, or foes, to God and to all good. It is a serious inquiry, but now is a proper time to make it.

SERMON VI.

SAINTS, AS THEY APPEAR TO GOD.

"He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel."—Numbers, xxiii. 21.

Balak, the king of Moab, being alarmed at the approach of Israel, sent for Balaam, the son of Beor, to come and curse his invading enemy. But though Balaam was hostile to Israel, and to the God of Israel, and wished to comply with Balak's request, yet God, by a controlling influence over his heart, disposed him to bless, instead of cursing Israel. This Balaam expressly declares in the verse before the text. "Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it." The next words are, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." Jacob and Israel are here synonymous appellations, and both denote Israelites indeed, or the peculiar friends and favorites of God. This warrants us to say,

That God sees no moral deformity or imperfections in saints.

Though this proposition seems to be paradoxical, yet I shall endeavor to illustrate the truth and propriety of it, by various representations of scripture. I shall begin with observing,

That the scripture represents particular saints as perfect. God says that "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations." He gives the same character to Job. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" David says, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." And speaking of the wicked, he says, "They shoot in secret at the perfect." Solomon likewise uses the same phraseology. "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it." Paul says of

himself and other apostles, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect." All these passages seem to coincide with the text, and represent individual saints as pure and perfect in the sight of God. But we further find saints in general represented in the same light. God speaking of his Church, by the prophet Isaiah, says, "I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." This is representing the Church as perfectly beautiful and amiable. In the same style, God speaks of his Church in the sixty-second chapter of Isaiah. "Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." We meet with a similar representation of the saints, in the third chapter of Malachi. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it: and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." If saints are God's jewels, his crown of glory, and his royal diadem; then he must view them as completely adorned with the beauties of holiness. And this is the uniform representation of the Church in Solomon's Song, that is allowed to be a sacred dialogue between Christ and his Church, in which they mutually speak of each other's moral beauties and excellencies. The Church represents Christ as supremely amiable and glorious: while, on the other hand, Christ represents the Church as morally beautiful, amiable, and without the least imperfection. "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." And the New Testament writers tell us, that "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Thus saints are represented as pure, perfect, spotless, and without the least moral defect, deformity, or imperfection. He beholds no iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel.

But how can this be true? Does not the all-seeing and heart-searching God view saints just as they are? And are they really free from all deformity and imperfections? Or do they view themselves in this light? The Church seems to acknowledge her uncomeliness, by saying, "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Does not Paul speak the language of all true saints,

when he cries, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" How then can God be said to view saints as perfectly amiable, without the least spot or moral deformity? He must have some peculiar views of them, to justify and explain such representations as have been mentioned. And it is true, that he actually does view them in a peculiar light. *He sees their whole character at one clear and comprehensive view.* He sees them as they have been, as they are, and as they will be, all at once. He has one entire and intuitive view of them from eternity unto eternity. He loved them before the foundation of the world; he loves them now; and always will love them. They have always been the objects of his complacency and delight. For in his view they have always been possessed of all the amiable qualities that will adorn and beautify them, through every period of their existence. And in scripture God speaks of them as they appear to him, perfectly amiable and excellent. Nor is this either strange or absurd, since, as far as we are able, we view things in such a complex and extensive light. The parent does not view the want of strength, the want of knowledge, or the want of speech, in his infant child, as a blemish or imperfection. But why not? The reason is, he views the infant as a man in miniature. He sees him not only as he is, but as he will be, when age shall have given him strength, intelligence, vivacity, speech, and sprightliness. And when he arrives at years of manhood, the parent no longer sees in him the follies and foibles of childhood and youth, but views him as he is, and probably will be in the future scenes of life. We are continually viewing objects in this complex and comprehensive light. All our valuable possessions derive their greatest worth and importance from viewing them, not merely as what they are at present, but as what they will be in their future connections and consequences. And since God has one intuitive, comprehensive view of saints, there is a propriety in his representing them as they now appear to him, after their present deformity and imperfection shall have been swallowed up, and they shall have arrived at the perfection of moral beauty and excellence. For,

1. Viewing them in this light, he sees them all as completely forgiven. And complete forgiveness is complete reconciliation. When we completely forgive any of our fellow men who have injured us, we become completely reconciled to them, and view them as amiable as we did before they had offended, and indeed more amiable. It is true, there is a partial forgiveness, which implies only a partial reconciliation; but perfect forgiveness always implies perfect reconciliation. So, having perfectly

forgiven saints, God is perfectly resigned to them, and sees no iniquity or perverseness in them. This is plainly the scripture representation of divine forgiveness. It is represented under a variety of metaphors, which convey the same idea. God is said to forget the sins of saints. Jer. xxxi. 34. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more." God is said to cast their sins into the bottom of the sea. Mic. vii. 18. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." God is said to cover their sins. "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." And God is said to blot out their sins. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins." All these metaphors imply, that in forgiving the sins of saints, God becomes completely reconciled to them. What iniquity or perverseness can he see in them, after he has forgotten, covered, blotted out, and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea? When therefore he views them in this light of forgiveness, he must view them as without spot, or wrinkle, or view them as perfectly beautiful and amiable.

2. Seeing them in one complex and comprehensive view, God looks upon them as not only pardoned, but completely purified from all their dross and tin, or moral imperfections. He has begun a good work in them, which he has determined to carry on until the day of Jesus Christ, when they will become perfect in holiness, and without blame before him in love. They are constantly approaching nearer and nearer towards perfection, and will soon arrive at the full stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. The moment they enter the gates of heaven, they will throw off all their moral deformities, and put on the white and clean robes of unsullied righteousness. The apostle, speaking on this subject, says, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." And as saints will be completely

purified from all the remains of moral corruption, when they shall have arrived at the world of glory; so, from that time forward, they will make swift and large advances in holiness, and become inconceivably more and more holy, amiable, and excellent, through the ceaseless ages of eternity. Now, we ought to consider, that God has a present, full, and comprehensive view, not only of their perfect freedom from sin, but of all that holiness and excellence which they will ever attain through all the changing scenes of their immortal existence. And viewing the whole of their complex characters in this light, their deformities are absorbed in their excellencies, and their sins are swallowed up in their growing love, gratitude, and praise. So that God may say, with great propriety, that he sees no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel. Especially if we further reflect,

3. That God views all their deformities as turned into beauties. Though sin, indeed, cannot become holiness, nor moral blemishes become moral beauties, yet sin may become the occasion of holiness, and moral deformity may become the occasion of distinguishing moral beauty. And we have abundant reason to believe, that all the moral imperfections of saints in this life, will prove the occasion of such holy and happy effects in the world of light. There, every moral deformity will be a perpetual occasion of adding some peculiar beauty to their shining characters. In particular,

Their pride will be a perpetual occasion of humility. The higher their former pride arose, the deeper will they sink in humility and self-abasement. The proudest will be the humblest. Those who aspired the highest, will forever lie the lowest. The aspiring mother of Zebedee's children will be ashamed and confounded, that she once desired the Lord of glory to permit her two sons to sit, one on his right hand, and the other on his left, in the kingdom of heaven. And James and John themselves will shrink into nothing when they recollect that they made the same ambitious and presumptuous request. In a word, all the pride of saints will be the perpetual occasion of their everlasting humiliation. Again,

Their ingratitude will become an occasion of gratitude. The more they reflect upon their ingratitude for the great and distinguishing favors conferred upon them in this world, the more will their hearts burn within them, and kindle into a flame of gratitude, for the wonders of divine goodness and sovereign grace exercised towards them. The more the apostle Paul reflects upon his ingratitude for that light he resisted, and that divine patience he abused, the warmer gratitude he will

feel and express, that he was made a vessel of mercy, and an instrument and heir of divine glory. Again,

The murmurs of saints will be turned into arguments of praise. The more they murmured under the government of God, the more they will praise him for all the afflictive, as well as merciful dispensations of his providence. The murmurs of Jacob, of Job, of David, and of Jeremiah, will be turned into motives of praise, for that marvellous grace which triumphed over all their unreasonable complaints and lamentations, and raised them to some of the highest mansions in heaven. How deeply and tenderly will it affect the hearts of all the children of God to reflect, that they once murmured, and complained of God, for consulting their highest good, and leading them in the right path to endless holiness and happiness! In short, their enmity will be turned into love; their stupidity into sensibility; their ignorance into knowledge; their negligence into activity; and every moral deformity into a moral beauty. The more deformed and unamiable saints are on earth, the more amiable, beautiful, and excellent they will appear in the state of perfection to which they are approaching, and in which they will be immovably fixed. All the moral blemishes in the repentant prodigal were turned into beauties in the eye of his father. When he saw him returning, all his paternal affections were enlivened, and he was ready to say, This my son was haughty, but now he is humble; he was rebellious, but now he is dutiful; he was ungrateful, but now he is grateful; he was impenitent, but now he is penitent; he was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he is found. Never did his son appear so amiable and beautiful before. His deformities were absorbed in his beauties, which excited peculiar paternal affections in the breast of his father. This parable was designed by Christ to illustrate the views and feelings of the Father of mercies towards all penitent, believing, returning sinners. As the father of the prodigal could see no blemish in his returning son, so God, speaking after the manner of men, can see no iniquity or perverseness in the children of light, but views their complex characters as without spot or wrinkle.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. The view we have taken of this subject, affords no support to the doctrine of eternal justification. Antinomians maintain that all the elect are justified from eternity, and they build their opinion upon our text, and other kindred passages of

scripture, which speak of God's eternal love to saints. But no such conclusion can justly be drawn from these passages, which represent God as only viewing saints in a complex and extensive light. This view of them by no means implies that he justified or pardoned them from eternity. He might have loved them, and elected them, before they existed; but he could not have regenerated them before they existed, nor have pardoned them before they sinned and repented. God sees things future as clearly as he sees things present. He sees that saints will exist, before they do exist. He sees that they will sin and repent, before they do sin and repent. And he sees that they will be justified, before they are actually justified. But this does not imply that they existed from eternity, or that they sinned from eternity, or that they repented from eternity, or were justified from eternity. Paul had a lively view of his future and eternal blessedness, before he died. For he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." This anticipated view of himself, did not imply that he sinned from eternity, nor that he was justified and glorified from eternity. It is both absurd and dangerous, to teach that the elect were justified from eternity; and that all they have to do in order to be saved, is to believe that they were pardoned and justified from eternity. This dangerous doctrine was taught in England two hundred years ago, by many ministers; and it has lately been revived there again. It has been long taught in this country, and is still partially or fully taught, by both learned and unlearned teachers. But it is extremely dangerous, both in theory and practice. All who maintain that faith is before love and repentance, virtually teach this Antinomian and seductive doctrine, which ought to be unequivocally discarded and guarded against, though exhibited in the most plausible and agreeable manner.

2. It appears from what has been said in this discourse, that saints will eventually appear the most amiable creatures in the universe. Though in respect to their intellectual powers and capacities they will always be a little lower than angels, yet they will rise above them in their moral beauties and excellencies. They will have some peculiar and beautiful traits in their characters, which cannot be found in any other creatures. As their moral imperfections once degraded them below all innocent creatures, so the same imperfections will prove the

happy occasion of raising them above all who have never needed repentance and forgiveness. They will exercise and exhibit such humiliation as innocent creatures never can exercise or exhibit. They will feel and express that godly sorrow that innocent creatures never felt, nor can feel. They will feel that obligation and disposition to praise God that innocent creatures never can feel and express. Says John, "And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders; and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." The imperfections of saints will prepare them to feel and express that gratitude and praise which no other creatures in the universe can feel and express. This the angels now know, and therefore they rejoice "over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." Their repentance, gratitude, and praise will not only exhibit their own peculiar excellencies, but at the same time display the peculiar glory of God in the view of the whole intelligent universe. So the apostle represents the design of redeeming love towards the vessels of mercy. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known *by the Church* the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." God may invite angels to see his saints, in order to behold his glory and theirs. He may direct their eyes to Saul the persecutor, now full of gratitude, humiliation, and praise; or to Manasseh, that prodigy of guilt, now full of gratitude, penitence, and godly sorrow; or to the penitent malefactor, full of admiration, gratitude, humility, and praise; or to some of the crucifiers of Christ, now full of admiration, self-condemnation, penitential sorrow, and unfeigned gratitude. How will the manifold wisdom, astonishing sovereignty, and discriminating grace of God shine, in forming such holy, amiable, and happy characters, who will display the glory of God in the most visible and striking manner, and be the ornaments of heaven forever.

3. Does God view saints in such a light? How unreasonable and absurd it is in them to distrust his love, his care and faithfulness towards them. He has become reconciled to them,

blotted out their transgressions, promised to be their Father and Friend, and assured them that all things work together for their good. What more can they reasonably desire that he should say to them, or do for them, to make them cheerful, easy, and contented under all circumstances of life? But they often murmur and complain, and distrust the divine wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness. Jacob, whom God had remarkably protected, and distinguished by peculiar promises and favors, once sunk into despondency, and complained that all God's dispensations were against him, and would bring down his gray hairs to the grave, though he was seeking his highest temporal and spiritual benefit. This was extremely ungrateful and criminal. Job, David, Elijah, and Jeremiah were guilty of similar ingratitude and unbelief, which produced many groundless murmurs and complaints. Indeed, the whole Church were sometimes ready to murmur, distrust, and despond. For "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." In all such cases, the children of Zion forsake and forget their God. They cannot distrust, nor despond, while they keep themselves in the love of God. A filial spirit towards him will not allow them to doubt of his paternal affection towards them. There is hardly any way in which good men more frequently manifest an evil heart of unbelief, than by their murmurs and complaints under the wise and benevolent dispensations of providence. They ought constantly to rejoice, that the Lord reigns, and that their times are in his hands, who will never leave nor forsake them, unless they leave and forsake him. David felt himself condemned for his distrust in the care and faithfulness of God. He had been ready to ask, "Will the Lord cast off forever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in his anger shut up tender mercies. And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." After God has told saints how much he loves them, how much he values them, how much he delights in them, and what great things he will certainly do for them, it must be extremely ungrateful and undutiful to call his goodness and veracity in question, and withdraw their confidence from him. They must, and they often do feel self-condemned for their unreasonable distrust and groundless fears. It becomes them to resolve, and to keep their resolution, that they "will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High," and live by faith in his unchangeable and never-failing promises. Christ forbids them to "take

thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." He that takes care of the beasts of the field, and feeds the fowls of heaven, and hears the young ravens when they cry, will never fail to take care of his own children, whom he loves more than any earthly parent loves his child.

4. Does God see saints in such a fair and beautiful light? What great encouragement then have they to grow in grace, and improve in every moral beauty and excellence. He tells them as he told Daniel, they are greatly beloved. He calls them his sons and daughters, his jewels and his glory. This ought to encourage and animate them, to purify their hearts from all unholy affections, and to do "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report" and praise-worthy. What is more animating to a youth than to be told, that he is much esteemed, and that much is expected from him? What is more animating to a soldier, than to be told that he has acquitted himself well, and has the esteem and confidence of his commander? And what can be more animating to Christians, than to be told by God himself, who knows their hearts, that they have his peculiar love and approbation? What though the world know them not, and even despise and oppose them? If God be for them, who can be against them? If they have the love and approbation of God, why should they fear the frowns of the world? God has told them what they now are, and what they shall be, and this ought to give them courage and resolution to walk worthy of their high and holy calling, and future prospects. The beloved apostle John presses this motive upon his fellow Christians, to become more and more conformed to the image of Christ. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Believers have no cause to be faint and weary in their Christian course, but the most animating motives to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He assures them that they shall finally shine forth in all the beauties of holiness, as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Be entreated then to "add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue,

knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." And be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord," but will meet an ample and glorious reward.

5. If God views saints with complacency and delight, would it not greatly increase their peace and comfort to view each other in the same amiable light? They are too apt to look (chiefly or only) upon one another's moral defects and imperfections, which cools, and deadens, and often destroys their mutual brotherly love. This draws after it very disagreeable consequences, which injure themselves and the world. Brotherly love is one of the brightest evidences that they can have of their own sincerity. Says an apostle, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." And their mutual brotherly love is one of the best evidences that they can exhibit to the world that they belong to Christ. So he says in the seventeenth chapter of John. "Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." The world distinguished the primitive Christians, by their peculiar love and attachment to one another; and the world still views this as a peculiar mark of their sincerity. They are commanded to "let brotherly love continue." David appealed to God that he exercised brotherly love. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." Since God loves saints, notwithstanding all their moral imperfections, they ought to love one another, though they fall far below perfection in this life. So the apostle argues. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." This argument is very tender and forcible. Who can resist its force? God sees a vast many more imperfections in Christians, than they can see in one another, and still he loves them. Surely then they ought to love one another. This would greatly promote their inward comfort, their external peace, and extensive usefulness. By the want of it they discourage each other's hearts, and weaken each other's hands, and obstruct the great cause which they have bound themselves to promote.

6. Do saints appear so amiable and excellent in the view of God? Surely then they ought to appear amiable in the view of the world. They are the excellent of the earth. They deserve the esteem and approbation of the world. Their enemies can have no excuse for hating and opposing them. Their moral imperfections are no excuse. They have no right to expect that saints should be free from these, in this imperfect, probationary state. They have no right to live upon these, and justify their own impenitence, unbelief, and disobedience, by the short-comings of Christians. Those who were so severe upon Job for his supposed and real imperfections, were finally obliged to go to him to pray for them, that they might find forgiveness with God. And if impenitent sinners ever do find pardon and mercy, it will be through the intercessions of saints, whom they contemn and despise. It is the immediate duty of those without to look into their own hearts, renounce their disaffection to God and to his friends, and accept the humiliating terms of the gospel. And they will never have good evidence, that they have passed from death unto life, until they find that they love the brethren. They are not required to unite with the brethren, until they love them; but they are required to love them, upon pain of being forever separated from them, and falling under their everlasting disapprobation. Now are you prepared to meet the disapprobation of God, and of Christ, and of all heaven, and of your own consciences? "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

SERMON VII.

COVENANT WITH GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

"And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words."—Exodus, xxiv. 7, 8.

It belongs to God to propose to enter into covenant with men, and not to men to propose to enter into covenant with him; for it is an act of condescension for God to enter into covenant with man; but it is an act of duty in men to enter into covenant with God. Accordingly, God has a right to require men to enter into covenant with him, but they have no right to require him to enter into covenant with them. This appears not only from the nature of a covenant, but from the account the scripture gives us of all the covenant transactions between God and man. God proposed to enter into covenant with Abraham, and required him to comply with the terms he proposed. Just so God proposed to enter into covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, and required them to comply with the terms which he proposed. "And he said unto Moses, come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel.—And Moses came, and told the people all the words of the Lord.—And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and

said, Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." By these words which God spake to Moses, and which he wrote and read to the people, we are to understand the terms of the covenant which God proposed and required his people to comply with and fulfill. What these terms were, we find in the three preceding chapters, which comprise not only the ten commandments written on two tables of stone, but precepts, prohibitions, and penalties, respecting servants, murder, trespasses, and minor transgressions; all which the people solemnly promised to obey. The text contains the proper form of a religious covenant between God and man. I shall therefore,

I. Consider the general nature of a covenant.

II. Consider the nature of a religious covenant between God and man.

III. Inquire whether men have a right to enter into a religious covenant with God.

I. We are to consider the general nature of a covenant. Any covenant is different from either a mere declaration, or a promise. A man may speak his mind, or tell his intention before two, or twenty, or an hundred persons, without making a promise to any one. A man may seriously and openly declare before any persons, that he intends to go to a certain place next week, or to build a house next year, or to sow or plant a certain field this year; and if this be his real intention, he speaks the truth, but he makes no promise by this bare declaration, and is at perfect liberty to alter his mind, without being chargeable with falsehood, because he did not bind himself to act agreeably to his declaration. He may indeed charge himself, and others may charge him with being fickle, but not with a breach of promise, or violation of any divine command. Men have a right to form good intentions and keep them a secret in their own breast, and while they keep them secret, they injure nobody and bind nobody; and if they express their good intentions, they are no more binding than they were before.

But a promise is very different from a bare declaration. If a man promise another man, either absolutely or conditionallly, that he will do something for him, he is bound to fulfill his promise, if it be in his power to fulfill it, unless he to whom he promises release him from his obligation. The reason is, that a promise excites expectation and dependence in the mind of him to whom the promise is made; and if he be disappointed he is injured, and has ground to complain of him who has injured him. It makes no difference whether the promise be absolute or conditional, for a conditional promise is as binding as

an absolute promise, if the conditions take place. So that all consistent promises are always binding, and can never be violated without guilt. In this respect they entirely differ from mere declarations.

And now it is easy to see that a covenant is essentially different from both a declaration and a promise. For a covenant is a mutual contract, agreement, or stipulation between two or more parties, upon certain conditions. These conditions both or all parties are mutually bound to fulfill; nor can either party dissolve the mutual obligation without the consent of the other. If one man makes a promise to another, the person to whom the promise is made, may if he pleases, dissolve the obligation of the other, because it can never be supposed that releasing a man from an obligation can do him an injury. But in a mutual covenant, all the parties are bound to each other, and consequently cannot dissolve the covenant without mutual *consent;* for if one party should presume to dissolve their own obligation without the consent of the other, the other would feel themselves to be injured, and have reason to complain. This is the general nature and obligation of a covenant. I now proceed to consider,

II. The nature of a *religious* covenant between God and man. According to what has been said under the preceding particular, it appears, that a covenant between God and man must be of the same nature as a covenant between man and man. It is a mutual contract, agreement, or stipulation between God and man, upon certain terms. Though the covenant between God and man be a *religious* covenant, yet it is of the same nature and obligation as any other covenant. God has a right to command his people to enter into a mutual covenant with himself, and to propose the mutual terms of it. He commanded his people Israel, at Mount Sinai, to enter into a mutual covenant with himself. He also proposed the mutual terms of the covenant, and commanded the people on their part to comply with the terms he proposed, and graciously promised to fulfill the covenant on his part. He revealed the terms of the covenant to Moses, and directed him to write the terms in a book, and then directed him to read the book of the covenant in the audience of all Israel; and when they heard and understood it, they solemnly promised before the all-seeing, heart-searching, and visibly present God, to comply with the terms which he proposed and required them to comply with. So it is expressly said. "And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrified peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning these words." This transaction between God and his people was precisely the same, as a mutual oath between them to fulfill the terms of the covenant. The people swore, and God swore to keep the covenant faithfully. So Moses explains this covenant transaction in the twenty-ninth chapter of Deuteronomy. "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God, that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." The first time God entered into covenant with Abraham and promised to give to him and to his seed the land of Canaan, it is said, he sware unto him, and confirmed his oath by sacrifice. See Genesis xv. 18, and xxvi. 3. Just so, the mutual covenant which God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was a mutual *oath* or covenant sealed by the *blood* of a sacrifice, which was sprinkled on the book of the covenant, and on the people who bound themselves by a solemn oath to fulfill the terms of the covenant. These mutual terms we find plainly expressed, in the twenty-sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, where Moses says to the people, "This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments; thou shalt, therefore, keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments."

Now, in the view of the covenant transaction of God with his people Israel, we may easily learn what are the mutual obligations between God and his people in their mutual religious covenant at this day. As God commanded Israel to enter into a religious covenant with him, so he commands men at this day to enter into a religious covenant with him. And as he com-

manded his people Israel to love him supremely, and to obey him perfectly, as the terms of the religious covenant with them, so he now commands men at this day to love him supremely, and to obey him perfectly, as the terms of entering into a religious covenant with him. Here then I would observe,

1. That God requires those who enter into a religious covenant with him, to love him supremely. He certainly required this as a term of entering into covenant with his people at mount Sinai. His command runs in these words: "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." He required the Israelites to exercise true love to his character, and become cordially reconciled to him through faith in the promised Messiah: or in other words, he required them to be sincerely pious, in order to enter into the religious covenant which he proposed and commanded them to make. It was not, as many have supposed, a mere external, political covenant, but a holy, religious covenant, which could not be complied with by any who did not love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might. And this same supreme love to himself, God now requires of all who at this day make a public profession of religion, and enter into a religious covenant with him.

2. God requires those who enter into a religious covenant with him at this day, not only to love him supremely, but to obey him perfectly. He certainly required this in his covenant with Israel at mount Sinai. Moses said unto them, "This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments; thou shalt, therefore, keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Ye shall observe to do, as the Lord your God hath commanded you; ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live." It is perfect obedience God enjoined upon Israel in his covenant with them. And he enjoins the same perfect obedience upon those, who at this day make a public profession of religion, and enter into a religious covenant with him. Perfect obedience implies cordial obedience, universal obedience, and constant or perpetual obedience. To yield perfect obedience to God, men must obey him from the heart, they must obey all his commands, and they must obey them constantly and perpetually. Nothing short of this is perfect obedience, and nothing short of perfect obedience does God ever require of any of mankind. Such perfect obedience does God require of all

who enter into a religious covenant with him. And he requires them to promise to love him supremely, and to obey him perfectly, under the solemnity of an *oath*. When they covenant with God, they swear to perform all the terms of the covenant which he has proposed; and he, on the other side, swears by himself that he will fulfill his promise to them to be *their* God, if they fulfill the terms of the covenant on their part. Both he and they bind themselves to fulfill their obligations. The public profession of religion at this day is as solemn and important a transaction as it was at mount Sinai, because it necessarily implies a mutual covenant between God and man, sanctioned by the solemnity of a mutual oath, which creates the strongest moral obligation to fidelity that can possibly exist between God and man. This naturally leads us to consider,

III. Whether men have a right to enter into such a religious covenant with God. If this covenant has been truly and properly described and explained, it appears to be extremely strict and solemn. It contains mutual promises and obligations of vast extent and importance, which are ratified by the highest possible moral sanctions. This has led many to doubt whether men have a right to enter into such a strict and extensive covenant with God. All men, without a single exception, are weak, dependent, mutable, and sinful creatures. How then can it be consistent or right for them to promise to love God supremely, and to obey him perfectly, universally, constantly, and perpetually, as long as they exist in this world, and in the world to come, and seal their promise by the solemnity of an oath? This question has been thought to be of difficult solution, and different methods have been taken to solve it. Some have thought that there is a condition to be understood in the promise on man's part. Accordingly, some have inserted a condition in their church covenant, and required the professor only to say, "I will, *by divine grace*, or *the grace of God assisting*, walk in all the commandments of the Lord constantly and perpetually." But we find no such condition or reserve in the covenant which God required the children of Israel to make at mount Sinai, and for this good reason, that such a condition and reserve would have destroyed all the obligation of the covenant with respect to the great majority of those who entered into covenant on that solemn occasion. At the time they made their public profession of supreme love and universal obedience to God, he implicitly called in question their sincerity, for he said to Moses when he mentioned their prompt and universal profession of obedience, "O that there

were such an heart in them!" And after Moses had led them out of Egypt through the Red Sea and through the wilderness to the borders of Canaan, he plainly told them that God had not given them grace, or caused them to fulfill their promised obedience. "The Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." Who can suppose that they did not break their covenant promise, because God did not give them grace and assistance to fulfill it? But they would not have broken it, if they had made it upon the condition, that if God should give them grace and assistance to obey his commands, they would obey them: but inasmuch as God did not give them grace and assistance to obey, they did break their covenant promise. It is, therefore, unquestionably true, that no such condition or reserve was contained in the covenant they made. And no such condition or reserve ought to be made or understood in a church covenant at this day. But there is another objection against supposing that the covenant between God and man is so strict as has been represented. It is said, God knows that all men by nature have not the love of God in them, and are under the dominion of a carnal mind which is entirely opposed to him; how then can he consistently propose to enter into covenant with them upon the strict condition of their loving him supremely, and obeying him perfectly and perpetually. He must know, that if they promise, they will not fulfill. This creates no difficulty on his part; for though they promise absolutely, yet he promises conditionally. They are bound, whether they fulfill their promise or not; but he is not bound to fulfill his promise, unless they fulfill theirs. The question now returns, Have men a right to enter into a religious covenant with God, and absolutely promise to love him supremely, and to obey him perfectly? I answer, they have a right to enter into such a strict and solemn covenant with God, for the following plain reasons:

1. Because God commands them to enter into such a strict and solemn covenant with him. He commanded all the congregation of Israel at mount Sinai to enter into a solemn covenant with him, and bind themselves with an oath, to love him with all the heart, and to obey him perfectly and perpetually. And he commands all where the gospel comes at this day, to make the same strict and solemn covenant with him. This command authorizes and morally obliges all men to enter into the mutual covenant which he proposes. They are as really bound to obey this as any other command of God. It is clothed with the same infinite authority as all other divine commands

are, and it is an absolute, unconditional command. Says the Psalmist, "Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God." Again, "*I* have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." Nothing but depravity of heart can prevent any who live under the light of the gospel from knowing and feeling that it is their duty to make the mutual covenant with God, which he has proposed and commanded them to make.

2. All men have a right to enter into a mutual religious covenant with God upon the terms which he has proposed; because the terms which he has proposed are perfectly reasonable. They are such as his infinite wisdom and goodness moved him to propose. He knew the relation in which mankind stand to him, and the relation in which he stands to them. He knew what was right in the nature of things for him to require them to do, as conditions upon which a mutual covenant between him and them ought to be established. And he has required no terms but what are right in the nature of things, as terms of the covenant on their part and on his. It is right in the nature of things, that all men should love him supremely, and obey him perfectly and perpetually. Accordingly, he has required men to love him supremely, and obey him perfectly and perpetually, as the only proper terms upon which he can consistently enter into a mutual religious covenant with them. It is right in the nature of things, that God should approve and reward those who love him supremely, and obey him perfectly; and if he please "show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed by an *oath*. That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Men may and ought to enter into the strict covenant between them and God, because the terms of it, which he proposes, are perfectly right and proper on his part and theirs.

3. Men have a right to enter into a mutual covenant with God, because the terms of the covenant which he proposes they are able to perform. They are as able to love as to hate him, and they are as able to love him supremely as to love him at all. Their having once hated him, is no reason why they should not love him supremely in time to come, and forever: nor does their past hatred throw any natural difficulty or impediment in the way of their loving him supremely and perpetually. So that they are able to perform this condition of the covenant.

And they are as able to obey any command of God, as to disobey it. And if they are able to obey one command of God, they are able to obey every command of God. And if they are able to obey the command of God at one time, they are equally able to obey his commands at all times. They have a right, therefore, to bind themselves by the solemnity of an oath to love God supremely, and obey him perfectly. The terms of the covenant are no stricter than their duty; and surely they may bind themselves to do their duty. I shall conclude with one

REFLECTION.

What gratitude do all professors of religion owe to God, for his graciously condescending to enter into a mutual covenant with them, and promising to be their God! This promise, which he has confirmed by an oath, comprises all temporal, spiritual, and eternal good. Sit and meditate upon this promise, and you will find it to be good to be at the table of the Lord, and find that peace and consolation which the world cannot give nor take away.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the nature of covenanting in general, and from the nature of covenanting with God in particular, that the making of a public profession of religion is a very solemn transaction. It implies a mutual covenant between God and man, and mutual obligations to each other, sanctioned by the solemnity of a mutual oath. The mutual covenant made and sealed by blood and by oath at mount Sinai, between God and his people, was certainly one of the most solemn transactions that was ever seen upon earth. The mount that burned with fire, involved in blackness, darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, were so terrible, "that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." Under these extraordinary and affecting circumstances, nearly two millions of souls bound themselves to love God supremely, and obey him perfectly and perpetually, by the strongest moral obligations in nature. This was an astonishingly great and interesting transaction. But though no such great adventitious circumstances attend the profession of religion at this day; yet the very same mutual covenant between God and man is made and ratified by the solemnity of an oath. When any make a public profession of religion, they make a mutual covenant

with God, and avouch him to be their God, "and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and to hearken unto his voice:" while God on his part avouches them "to be his peculiar people," or cordial friends, and engages to be their God. This obligation of professors never can be dissolved, whether they are sincere or insincere. The bonds of the covenant, in their full force and obligation, lie upon them. It deeply concerns all who have made a public profession of religion, to remember the bonds by which they have bound themselves to love and serve God perfectly. And it deeply concerns those who are about to make a public profession of religion, to realize the everlasting bonds by which they are about to bind themselves to be what God requires them to be, —perfectly holy and obedient.

2. We learn from the terms of the mutual covenant which God requires men to make, who can sincerely make such a solemn covenant with him. We have seen that the terms of the covenant are supreme love to God, and perfect and perpetual obedience to all his commands. These terms alarm many, and they dare not solemnly engage to fulfill them. They say that they imply more than they can perform, or at least more than they have any ground to expect that they shall perform, if they should engage to do it by a public profession of religion. They are conscious to themselves that they are weak, impotent, depraved, dependent, mutable creatures, and cannot expect to be otherwise as long as they live. They ask, how can we, or anybody else, make a public profession of religion, and sincerely promise to love God supremely, and obey him perfectly, constantly, and perpetually? This question may be fully and intelligibly answered. Those who really love God supremely, and really desire and intend to obey him perfectly, may sincerely profess and promise to perform the conditions of the covenant which God proposes. God knows that they are able, and ought to perform the conditions of the covenant which he proposes and commands them to perform; and they know that they are able, and ought to perform the conditions which he requires them to perform. Why then can they not, and why should they not, sincerely and solemnly engage to do what God requires them to do? If they sincerely love God, and sincerely desire and intend to love and obey him forever, why can they not sincerely engage to do it? David felt no difficulty in making such a resolution and promise. He said, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise unto God while I have my being." And he repeated the same resolution and promise. "While I live will I

praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being." No man can sincerely promise to do what he knows he has not natural power to do, because he cannot sincerely *intend* to do it. But any man can sincerely promise to do what he knows he can do, and really *desires* and *intends* to do. David had no reason to expect that he should *always* love and obey God, for he had often failed to love and obey God perfectly; yet he could sincerely engage to love and obey God perfectly, when he actually desired and intended to love and obey him perfectly. Just so, those who do really love God supremely, and intend to obey him perfectly, can sincerely covenant with God, and engage to obey him perfectly and perpetually. All really pious persons, therefore, can sincerely make a public profession of religion upon his own terms, notwithstanding their known and acknowledged imperfection. Paul was undoubtedly a sincere professor of religion, though he knew and acknowledged that he had not attained to sinless perfection. He knew and said, "To *will* is present with me; but how to *perform* that which is good, I find not." But yet he declared, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." While he was conscious of loving the law of God, and actually desired and intended to obey it constantly and perpetually, could he not sincerely say so, and solemnly promise to do so? And this was all God required him to say and do when he publicly professed religion; and this is all that God now requires men to say and promise, when they profess religion, and take upon them the bonds of the covenant. The scriptural terms of admission into the church of God, though very strict, are yet very plain and practicable. If men were willing to do their duty constantly and perfectly, they would be willing to bind themselves to do their duty constantly and perfectly, by the bonds of a solemn covenant with God. The mutual covenant which God has proposed and required men to make, in order to attend divine ordinances, has always been the same from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to this day. But mankind, who are naturally unwilling to be bound to do their duty, have taken great pains, either to curtail this covenant, or to set it entirely aside. We in this country, for more than a hundred years, curtailed it, and modelled it into a half-way covenant. We allowed men to enter into the covenant, without engaging to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, if they would only bring their children to baptism. But some have been disposed to enjoy more freedom, and have set the covenant entirely aside. They allow and invite persons to come to all the ordinances of the Lord, without owning or

making any covenant at all. This is a very criminal departure from the original purity of the professing people of God. But there are some who are more orthodox in theory, that are less orthodox in practice. They believe that God does require his friends to enter into a mutual covenant with him, and solemnly bind themselves to love him supremely, and obey him perfectly; but yet they view themselves as sincere, pious Christians, while they are living in allowed neglect, from year to year, of all the special ordinances of God. All these theoretical and practical errors are principally owing to some misapprehension of the nature and obligations of the mutual covenant between God and man, which we have been considering. There is hardly any subject of more importance to be clearly understood, than the duty and qualifications for attending the special ordinances of God.

3. Since professors of religion are under solemn obligations to do their duty to God, they must be under similar obligations to do their duty to one another in the same church. At the same time that professors of religion lay themselves under covenant obligations to do their duty to God, they lay themselves under covenant obligations to do their duty to one another. For they not only make a mutual covenant with God, but also a mutual covenant with their brethren; and their covenant with their brethren, as well as their covenant with God, is sanctioned by the solemnity of an *oath*. While standing in the presence of God, and before angels and men, the professor makes a covenant with the Church, in substance similar to this, saying, "I submit myself to the government of Christ in his Church, and to the regular administration of it in this church in particular, and promise to attend the worship of God and the ordinances of the gospel in this place, so long as I am able, and God in his providence shall continue me here." To this the church, in substance replies, saying, "We will faithfully discharge the duties of that relation, which now subsists between us." Now does not such a mutual covenant between the members of a church, create the same solemn obligation to discharge their duty to one another, that their mutual covenant with God, creates to discharge their duty to him? Their covenant with him runs in this form: "We do now in the presence of the heart-searching God, and before angels and men, choose the Lord Jehovah for our God and portion, and heartily accept of Christ for our Redeemer and Saviour, as he is freely offered to us in the gospel: solemnly promising that we will yield a cordial and universal obedience to all the divine commands, and renounce the vanities of the

world, the service of sin, and approve ourselves true disciples of Jesus Christ, in all good carriage towards God and man." These are two mutual covenants, mutually binding the parties concerned, by one and the same solemn sanction. But do professors in general appear properly to feel their covenant obligations to discharge their duties to each other? Do they all appear to feel their covenant obligations to meet each other in the house of God, not only on sacramental Sabbaths, but on all other Sabbaths, unless providentially prevented? Do they realize that their covenant obligation to the church to which they belong forbids their forsaking them, and attending public worship with a church of the same or different denomination to which they do not belong? Do they appear to realize, that their covenant obligation to their brethren forbids them to neglect the public worship of God and all divine ordinances? It is well known, that such covenant-breaking prevails at this day in one place and another, and that churches are sadly dwindling and scattering. The allowed practice of such covenant-breaking anywhere, argues a neglect of the duties, which church members have bound themselves by a solemn mutual covenant to discharge. All covenants lay men under peculiar obligations to fidelity, and especially all religious covenants, which form the strongest moral bonds, that God and man can make. This subject solemnly admonishes professors and non-professors, rulers and subjects, and all in every relation in life, to fulfill all their promises, contracts, vows, and covenants. To live in the habitual and allowed violation of such solemn obligations, is to live in habitual and allowed disobedience to the known will of God. Covenant-breakers are placed in the catalogue of the vilest sinners that are particularly mentioned and condemned in the whole Bible.

4. Since all professors of religion lay themselves under covenant obligations to obey all the commands of God perfectly and constantly, all their transgressions are exceedingly criminal. All their deviations from the path of duty are violations of obligations, which non-professors cannot break. Their sins, therefore, are really more heinous in the sight of God and man, than the same sins in others. If they indulge a worldly spirit, or a murmuring spirit, or an unfriendly spirit, or any other selfish spirit, such internal sins are more criminal in them, than in others. If they deceive, defraud, or oppress, they are more criminal than others. If they neglect secret prayer, family prayer, or family government, their neglect is more criminal than the neglect of others. Or if they run into religious error, or vicious practice, their error and practice are more criminal,

than the same error and practice in others. All these internal and external sins are aggravated by reason of the strong and peculiar obligations which they violate. God remembers, if they do not, their vows and engagements to walk obediently before him, and is displeased with every instance of their unfaithfulness, and very often severely corrects them for it. He did Miriam, and Moses, and Jacob, and David, and Solomon, and Paul. He has always punished professors of religion more signally for their sins, than those who never laid themselves under the bond of the covenant. He has a peculiar claim upon professors, and expects more from them than from others. He said with respect to his vineyard, "I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes," for which he threatened to lay it waste. He said of Israel, "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie." But they did prove false to their covenant, for which he told them, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." It is as criminal now as ever it was, for professors to violate their vows and engagements to fidelity; and they all have reason to fear, as they are all more or less guilty, the marks of the divine displeasure. Yet,

5. All sincere professors of religion shall eventually be saved, notwithstanding all their moral imperfections and short-comings in duty. God has made a mutual covenant with them, and bound himself to be their God, and to conduct them safely to his heavenly kingdom. He said to his true Israel, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the holy One of Israel." Christ says to his sincerely professing friends, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Paul says to sincere Christians at Philippi, "He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." And he says to the Christians in Rome, "We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Hence he proceeds to say, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." But it is the covenant which God has made with all sincere professors of religion, that gives them the highest possible assurance of their final perseverance to eternal life. For it is as impossible that they should fail of salvation, as it is for God to fail of fulfilling his promise, which he has confirmed by the immutability of an oath.

6. It appears from all that has been said in this discourse, that none who have come to years of discretion have any excuse for not entering into covenant with God, and making a public profession of religion. God commanded all Israel to make a religious covenant with him, and engage to keep all his commands constantly and perfectly. After they had heard the covenant read, they all felt bound to give their public consent to the strict terms of it, and bind themselves in the most solemn manner to perform them perfectly. Accordingly they declared with one voice, "All that the Lord hath said, we will do, and be obedient." This was publicly taking upon them the bond of the covenant, and giving their hearts and lives to God without reserve. No Israelite durst refuse to enter into covenant with God, for he felt he had no excuse to make for refusing to obey the express command of God. It was in vain to say that he had no heart to love God supremely, and to obey him perfectly. There is reason to believe that thousands of the Israelites at mount Sinai might have said truly, that they had no heart to love God supremely, and to obey all his precepts and commands perfectly and perpetually; but this God knew, and they knew, afforded them no excuse for not loving and obeying him perfectly, or for not sincerely promising to do it. Their mere unwillingness to obey the divine commands could afford them no excuse for disobedience. The case is the same now as it was then. God now commands all men everywhere to repent, and give their hearts and lives to him; and no one who has come to years of maturity has any excuse to make for not obeying this known command. This truth ought to be believed and felt by all the non-professors in this place. They have had no excuse for neglecting to make a public profession of religion for five, or ten, or twenty, or forty years past. It seems as though many imagine, that the duty of entering into covenant with God and his people had ceased under the gospel; that it is now a matter of indifference whether they make a public profession of religion or not, and that they are entirely free from all guilt and blame for neglecting it. But this is a false and sinful opinion, which tends to weaken, diminish, and

destroy the churches at this day, by giving the men of the world the entire ascendency over them. It breaks down all visible distinction between saints and sinners. It is despising the invitation and command of God to comply with the mutual covenant which he offers to make with them. He is continually crying to them and saying, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." "Wherefore, come out from among them," that is, the idolaters, "and be ye separate, saith the Lord;—and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Is there not an invitation of mercy and a command of authority here? There is both, and none can disregard them without guilt and danger. Did you turn your backs to the Church and to the solemn ordinance of God, this morning, without a self-accusing conscience? or can you now reflect upon your conduct without self-condemnation and reproach? Did not some of you leave your brothers and sisters, your wives and children, to fulfill the duties of that mutual covenant which they made with God and he with them, in which he promised to be their God and portion forever? Can you who have neglected to comply with the terms of the mutual covenant which God has proposed to you and commanded you to make, find a single promise in the Bible, that he will be your God and portion? You are not among the citizens of Zion; you belong not to the household of faith; you are without God in this world; and will you not be without God in another? Are you prepared to meet the consequences? are you able to support them? Though you may have looked upon this church this day with indifference, or even aversion, they have looked upon you with tenderness, compassion, and grief. They are painfully apprehensive of both your guilt and danger. They view you in some measure as God views you, as guilty, miserable, perishing creatures. They anticipate the danger of your awful and eternal separation from them and from all good at the last day; and it is their heart's desire and prayer to God, that ye might be saved! But how must you feel, when you shall see many "come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven," and you yourselves thrust out! Christ has told you: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

SERMON VIII.

TASTING DIVINE GOODNESS.

"O TASTE and see that the Lord is good."—Psalm xxxiv. 8.

TASTING and seeing are natural senses, by which we gain the most certain and intuitive knowledge of sensible objects. It is by actually seeing the rainbow, that we get the most certain and intuitive knowledge of its various and beautiful colors. And it is by tasting honey that we get the most certain and intuitive knowledge of its sweetness. When the Psalmist, therefore, calls upon men to "taste and see that the Lord is good," he calls upon them to get the highest and most perfect knowledge of the goodness of God. Tasting and seeing are here used figuratively; for goodness cannot be perceived by any of our bodily senses. We are passive in perceiving the sweetness of honey, and in seeing the colors of the rainbow; for we cannot help perceiving the colors of the rainbow when we look at it; and we cannot help perceiving the sweetness of honey when we taste it. But seeing and tasting the goodness of God, is a free, voluntary, mental exercise, in which saints are most perfectly active. There is, therefore, the same propriety in David's exhorting them to taste and see that the Lord is good, in the text, as in his saying to them, in the next verse, "O fear the Lord, ye his saints." The text in this connection warrants us to say,

That all real saints taste the goodness of God.

I. I shall inquire what is meant by the goodness of God.

II. What is meant by saints tasting the goodness of God. And,

III. What effects flow from their tasting his goodness.

I. We are to inquire what is meant by the goodness of God.

The goodness of God is something distinct from all his natural attributes, concerning which mankind are generally agreed

in opinion. They generally suppose that God is eternal, self-existent, independent, and immutable; and that he possesses almighty power, unerring wisdom, and universal knowledge. But they are not so well agreed in respect to his goodness, which forms all his moral excellence. Indeed, some of the most noted Deists deny the goodness of God, and represent him as a pure infinite Intelligence, who is devoid of all moral excellence. But it is extremely absurd to suppose, that he who has made, who upholds and governs the world, and filled it with goodness, is himself destitute of goodness. It is true, his goodness is seated in his heart, and not in his power, wisdom, or knowledge; but it is inseparably connected with these natural perfections. God is good, for God is love. His love is pure, disinterested benevolence, which desires and seeks the highest good of the whole intelligent and percipient creation. This holy love forms his moral character; and in his own view comprises his supreme glory. For when Moses desired him to show him his glory, he said he would gratify his desire, and cause all his goodness to pass before him. His goodness essentially and summarily consists in his benevolent affections, which he exercises towards all his creatures, whether rational or irrational, that are capable of enjoying happiness, or suffering misery. His heart is equal to his understanding; so that his goodness is commensurate with his boundless knowledge and wisdom. He possesses as much love, kindness, and beneficence as can exist in an intelligent and all-comprehensive mind. Hence our Saviour said, "There is none good but One;" that is, comparatively. All created goodness is as nothing, in comparison with the uncreated and unlimited goodness of God. His goodness is the source of all the goodness that exists in his creatures; and as far surpasses their goodness, as the fountain surpasses all the streams that flow from it. Let us consider,

II. What is meant by saints tasting the goodness of God.

This is something different from reasoning about the goodness of God; for men may reason about it without tasting it. Sinners, who never tasted the goodness of the Lord, are very apt to reason about it. It is the darling theme of some, who place all their future hopes upon divine goodness. They are continually declaiming upon the universal benevolence of the Deity; and imagine that they can demonstrate its nature, extent, and beneficent influence upon all intelligent creatures. The fallen angels, who perfectly hate the goodness of God, are capable of reasoning about it. Even good men may reason about divine goodness, while they do not taste it. To taste

the goodness of God is very different from reasoning about it; just as reasoning about the nature of honey is very different from tasting its sweetness.

To taste the goodness of God is something different from seeing the effects of it. These are to be seen all over the world, and by all the nations of the earth. The heathen who know not God, cannot help seeing the effects of his goodness, which fill their hearts with gladness. Those who are the most stupid under gospel light, daily discover the displays of divine goodness in the common course of providence, while they are very far from tasting it. Their eyes are evil, while they see that God is good to others; and they are so far from tasting that goodness which they see manifested to others, that they hate it with perfect hatred. Though all men see the effects of divine goodness, yet very few really taste it. Tasting, therefore, is very different from seeing it.

It may be further observed, that tasting the goodness of God is something different from feeling the effects of it. There is not a creature in the universe who has not felt the effects of divine goodness. All mankind are continually receiving innumerable favors from the beneficent heart and hand of God; but very few, however, taste his goodness, from which his blessings flow. The rich, the great, and prosperous, into whose bosoms God pours the bounties of providence in the largest profusion, seldom taste his goodness. They only taste their own happiness, without tasting the divine goodness from which it flows. It is true of saints, as well as of sinners, that they do not so constantly and sensibly taste the goodness of God, as they feel the effects of it.

But if saints tasting the goodness of God, means something different from their reasoning about it, or seeing the effects of it upon others, or feeling the effect of it upon themselves; the question still returns, what does their tasting divine goodness mean? To this there is but one general and satisfactory answer. By saints tasting the goodness of God is meant, their having an experimental knowledge of it from their own benevolent exercises of heart. They exercise benevolent affections, which are of the same nature as the pure, benevolent affections of God. They have been born of the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is love, and the same kind of love that exists in the heart of God. By being born of God, saints become partakers of the divine nature; which is the same thing, as being partakers of that holy love, which is of a divine nature. Being renewed in the spirit of their mind, saints have "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holi-

ness;" or "in knowledge, after the image of him that created them." God having given saints a new heart, has given them a heart after his own heart, which is a heart to know him. For as soon as they have a heart just like his heart, they know what his heart is. As soon as they feel universal benevolence, they know how God feels, who exercises the same affection. That is to say, they know the goodness of God, by what they experience in their own hearts. It is by experience of what passes in our own minds, that we gain the most certain knowledge of what passes in the minds of other men. It is by knowing what reason is in ourselves, that we know what reason is in others. It is by knowing what love, joy, hope, fear, and sorrow is in ourselves, that we know what love, joy, hope, fear, and sorrow is in others. Just so, the Scripture represents saints as knowing what passes in the heart of God, by knowing what passes in their own hearts. For, says the apostle, "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might *know* the things that are freely given to us of God. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Here we are told, that saints have a spiritual knowledge of God, which natural men or sinners have not; and that this spiritual knowledge of God is an experimental knowledge of him, or a knowledge which they gain from their own experience, in respect to the exercises of their own hearts. The same apostle expresses the same sentiment in his prayer for the Ephesians, "That ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. It is by the love which saints feel in their own hearts, that they know and comprehend the love of God and of Christ towards them. And the apostle John declares, that "love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is love." And again, "God is love: and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." So far as saints dwell in love, they dwell in God and God in them; their hearts are entirely united; they feel as God feels, and God feels as they feel. They experimentally know the love and goodness of God. This experimental knowledge of divine goodness, is perfectly easy to be understood, by

the lowest capacity. Let two persons meet and converse, who are in a state of joy, and they will experimentally know how each other feels. Let two persons in a state of sorrow meet and converse, and they will experimentally know how each other feels. When two persons experimentally know each other's joys, they taste each other's joys; and when two persons experimentally know each other's sorrows, they taste each other's sorrows. So when saints experimentally know the goodness of God, they taste his goodness. There is no mystery in saints experimentally tasting the goodness of God, and enjoying the happy effects of it. I proceed,

III. To point out the effects which flow from this source. While David was experimentally tasting the goodness of God, he felt an ardent desire, that others might taste his goodness, and enjoy the happy effects, which he had found, and they would find, flowing from it. Tasting the goodness of God, never fails to throw saints into a peculiar state of mind, and to produce a variety of delightful views and feelings. And here I may observe,

1. That their tasting the divine goodness, brings them near to God, and God near to them. Though they are constantly the objects of the care and kindness of God, who loads them with his benefits every day; yet they do not constantly taste his goodness, from which all their blessings flow. They too often forget and forsake God their Maker and Benefactor, and suffer their eyes and their thoughts to wander from him. In such circumstances, though he passes by them on their right hand and left, they do not perceive him; and though they occasionally think of him, he appears at a great distance, far above out of their sight; and so long as he is out of their sight, they do not taste his goodness in any of the favors he bestows upon them. But when they awake out of their stupidity and look through all secondary causes up to the supreme First Cause, and view all their favors as coming from the heart and hand of God, they taste his goodness, and are sweetly drawn to him by the cords of love. Their hearts rise in love to him, while they realize that his heart flows out in goodness to them, which brings them to such a mutual nearness, that they may be said to dwell in each other.

2. Tasting the goodness of God gives saints a clear, lively, and affecting sense of the greatness of divine goodness. Those who never taste the goodness of God, have very low and limited views of it. They measure his goodness by its effects upon themselves and others within the circle of their very imperfect knowledge and observation. They never trace his

goodness in its immense duration from eternity to eternity; nor in its immense extent from one end of the universe to the other, nor in the multiplicity and magnitude of the blessings which it is continually bestowing upon innumerable millions of rational and percipient creatures through the whole circle of creation. But supposing they should actually view the effects of divine goodness in their boundless duration, extent, multiplicity, and magnitude, yet their sense of the goodness of God would fall infinitely below the clear, lively, and affecting sense, which saints have of it when they experimentally taste it. For they view it in the Fountain, and not in the streams. What are the drops of the ocean, which rise into clouds, and fall upon the earth, in comparison to the ocean itself? What is the goodness, which fills the earth and the whole creation, in comparison with the fountain of goodness in God, from whom it comes? Those who are rooted and grounded in love, comprehend with all saints, the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that goodness in God, which they taste, and which is infinitely greater than any effects that ever have flowed, or ever will flow from it. David, who had tasted the goodness of God, had such a high and lively sense of it. He said, "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward; they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand." Tasting the goodness of God never fails to give saints such a lively, joyful, impressive sense of its boundless, bottomless, and immeasurable greatness. It fills them, as the apostle emphatically says, "with all the fullness of God."

3. Tasting the goodness of God removes all fears from the minds of saints. They often entertain painful fears about themselves and others, while they do not realize and taste the goodness of God. But when they realize and taste the goodness of God, it banishes all doubts, and fears, and anxiety from their minds. Says the apostle, "Perfect love casteth out fear." And David says in the context, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." While saints taste the boundless goodness of God, they cannot see any ground of fear in any part of the universe. For while they see the universe under the eye, and under the hand of almighty and boundless goodness, all creatures, and objects, and events appear to be perfectly safe. Their own benevolence perfectly

harmonizes with the benevolence of the Deity, and makes them ardently desire that every creature should be treated, and every event should take place, according to the dictates of unerring wisdom and unlimited goodness. While they taste the goodness of God, they are entirely willing to be in his hands themselves, and entirely willing that all other creatures should be in his hands. They can see nothing to fear, unless they fear that God should do wrong; but they cannot see that it is morally possible he should do wrong, while they taste and feel that he is perfectly good. Hear the fearless language of the Church upon this subject: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

4. Tasting the goodness of God unites the hearts of saints to one another. While they are in this happy frame, they feel united with all holy creatures in heaven and earth. So far as any appear to taste the goodness of God, they appear morally beautiful and amiable. They are experimentally acquainted with their views, desires, and affections, and love them for the same reason for which they love their own benevolent exercises. Their hearts are united like the hearts of David and Jonathan, who loved one another as their own souls. David felt this union of heart to all who had tasted the goodness of God as he had tasted it. He says, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." Christ prayed that all his true followers might be one, even as he and his Father are one; and his prayer is heard and answered in respect to all real Christians. Their hearts are united in benevolent affections. Having experimentally tasted the goodness of God, they know how all Christians feel, which unites them in the tender and indissoluble bonds of brotherly love.

5. Tasting the goodness of God excites in the hearts of saints an ardent desire that all others would taste his goodness. It had this effect upon David, which he expresses in the most tender and affectionate language: "O taste and see that the Lord is good." He sincerely and ardently desired that all others should taste the goodness of God that he tasted, and enjoy the happiness that he enjoyed, in consequence of it. He cried, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." And he uttered the same ardent desire in still

stronger and more emphatical language in the one hundred and seventh psalm. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" He repeats it again and again. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" It is the nature of true benevolence to desire the happiness of others, and especially that happiness which flows from tasting the goodness of God. All who have tasted divine goodness, sincerely desire that others should taste and enjoy it. Paul says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." And he more solemnly declares, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh." When saints approach the nearest to God, and most sensibly taste his goodness, they feel the most ardent desire for the salvation of others. And at such seasons, it appears to them that all might see and taste the goodness of God, and secure his everlasting favor. They find no difficulty in seeing and tasting the goodness of God, and it seems to them that others need find no difficulty in this. They know that the goodness of God is great enough to save any, however ill deserving; and they are ready to wonder why any should refuse to see, to taste, and to enjoy the goodness of God forever, which must make them completely and forever happy.

6. Tasting the goodness of God gives saints a humiliating sense of their stupidity, blindness, and ingratitude, in so often refusing to see and taste his goodness. When they really see and taste the goodness of God, they are astonished and self-condemned that they should not uniformly and constantly see and taste the profusion of divine goodness with which they are always surrounded. They realize that God has been good to them, while they have been blind and stupid, evil and unthankful. They can find no excuse for their stupidity and ingratitude. They feel as Job did, when he said unto God, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." They are ready to say to God, as David did when his eye had been evil, because God was good to others, "So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee." Nothing gives saints a deeper sense of their vileness and ill desert, than a clear view of the astonishing goodness of God to them, and their ungrateful returns to him. It fills them with shame,

self-reproach, and self-abasement before the Father of mercies, whom they have so often stupidly and ungratefully abused. But yet,

7. Their tasting the goodness of God makes them long for still greater and greater discoveries of it. After Moses had been in the Mount with God, and conversed with him face to face, as a man converses with his friend, and had often tasted his goodness, he still more ardently desired and besought the Lord to give him brighter displays of his glory, and cause all his goodness to pass before him. The more David tasted of the goodness of God, the more he desired to taste of it. "One thing," says he, "have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Yea, he declares, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Such are the views, and feelings, and desires of all real saints, while they think and taste of the goodness of God in the sanctuary, and in their nearest approaches to him. Like the disciples in the Mount, they desire more constantly to see, and more largely to taste, the goodness of the Lord.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said concerning tasting the goodness of God, what is properly to be understood by a *moral taste*, principle, or disposition. These terms are very often used at the present day; but perhaps little understood. Many suppose that a moral taste, principle, or disposition, means something previous to, and the foundation of, all holy and virtuous exercises, volitions, or affections, which is implanted or created in the minds of saints in regeneration. They suppose it exactly resembles the natural taste in point of passivity; and that it no more depends upon the desire, will, or choice of men, whether they shall have a taste for the goodness of God, than whether they shall have a taste for honey, or any particular kind of food or fruit. But there appears no foundation in nature for such a passive, involuntary moral taste. There is a foundation in nature for a natural taste. It arises from the peculiar organization and contexture of the palate, that different persons have different tastes, with respect to food and fruits, and the same persons at different times. But we cannot conceive of any different construction or contexture in the human

mind, that should make one man, and not another, taste the goodness of God, or the same man to taste it at one time, and not at another. The truth is, when the inspired writers use the word *Taste*, in respect to moral things, they use it figuratively, not for a dead, dormant, inactive, natural principle; but for an active, voluntary, moral exercise. Hence they exhort men to taste the goodness of God, as an immediate, indispensable duty. But this would be absurd if men could not taste and see that the Lord is good, until a new natural taste or principle was created in their minds. It is of the utmost importance that men should understand the essential difference between a natural and moral taste. It is impossible for those who deny this distinction, to make sinners see the propriety and justice of God's requiring them to love him immediately and supremely, upon pain of eternal destruction. But if a moral taste consists in free, voluntary, and benevolent exercises, then it is easy to make every one see the propriety and consistency of God's requiring all men to love him immediately and supremely, upon pain of his everlasting displeasure. In the view of this distinction every sinner's mouth is stopped, and his only excuse for not obeying every divine command is completely removed.

2. If we have properly described an experimental tasting of divine goodness, then it is something very different from men's tasting their own happiness. Saints never taste the goodness of God in their own happiness, without exercising the same kind of goodness that God exercises towards them. The men of the world have a high and keen sense of their own happiness, while they never taste the goodness of God from which it flows. The Israelites, at the side of the Red Sea, had a high sense of the happiness they enjoyed in consequence of their miraculous deliverance; while they did not experimentally taste the goodness of God in the least degree. Though they sung God's praises, yet they were destitute of every holy and grateful affection. The multitudes that followed Christ for the loaves and fishes, tasted their own happiness, but not his kindness and compassion. The whole world are continually rejoicing under the effects and influence of divine goodness; but how few taste and see that the Lord is good. None but those who experience goodness in their own hearts, can taste the goodness of God. As soon as any actually become good, they find the wide difference between tasting their own happiness, and the goodness of God from which it flows. And they feel a much higher enjoyment in tasting the goodness of God, than in tasting their own happiness. But there is reason to fear, that

many make a fatal mistake upon this subject. They rejoice in the effects of that goodness of God, which they do not taste, but perfectly hate.

3. If tasting the goodness of God produces such happy effects as have been mentioned, then it is impossible, that sinners should be so happy as saints, even in this life. Sinners never do, nor can enjoy any higher happiness, than that which they derive from the effects of divine goodness; but saints enjoy a purer and higher felicity, which flows from the enjoyment of the fountain of all blessedness. Sinners drink at the streams, which they know may, and must soon fail; but saints drink at the fountain which never can fail. The thought which sinners cannot entirely banish from their minds, that all the streams of goodness which are at present flowing in upon them, will soon cease to flow, often drinks up all their joy, and sinks them in fearful gloom and despondency. They are all their lifetime subject to bondage, through fear of death, which must destroy all their hopes and happiness. Their happiness is short, uncertain, and mixed with misery; while "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." They taste the goodness of God and its happy effects, which is a prelude to their future and eternal enjoyment of all good.

4. If saints sometimes taste the goodness of God, and enjoy its happy effects, then they are extremely unwise as well as criminal, in neglecting their duty. Their duty is, "to keep themselves in the love of God." And if they would only do this, they would bring God near to them, and continually taste his goodness. For while they keep themselves in the love of God, they dwell in God, and God in them. This they know to be true, by their actually tasting the goodness of God from time to time. If they would constantly exercise that disinterested benevolence, which God constantly exercises towards them and all mankind, they would be perfectly satisfied with his dealings with them, and every other person. They would see and feel no cause to murmur or repine with respect to themselves or any other person, object, or event. They would see and taste God's goodness in every place, and in every event. Angels who attend them, see, and enjoy, and taste the goodness of God towards them; and why should not they see, and taste, and enjoy the goodness of God continually? They can find no excuse for their neglect of this important duty.

5. If none can taste the goodness of God, who do not exercise goodness themselves, then it is extremely absurd and dangerous for impenitent sinners to rely upon the mere good-

ness of God to save them. For though his goodness be as boundless as they are apt to imagine, and as it certainly is, yet it affords no ground of hope to them. They have no taste for it. The waters of life are bitter to them. Universal, disinterested benevolence loathes and abhors their selfishness; and their selfishness loathes and abhors that pure love. This they may know from what they see and observe of it, in respect to themselves and others. They think it does them too little good, and does too much good to others. It promises everlasting good to others; but denounces everlasting evil to them. It is sovereign goodness, and sovereign goodness they will not take and enjoy. It must therefore leave them wretched and forlorn.

6. If all who taste the goodness of God shall be saved; then the terms of salvation are as low as possible. The prophet says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Again we read, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." It is not conceivable, that salvation should be offered upon lower terms.

7. Let all inquire, whether they have tasted that the Lord is good. Have you ever tasted of the fountain, instead of the streams? Have you found the happy effects of tasting divine goodness?

SERMON IX.

NATURE OF ATONEMENT.

"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."—1 Peter, i. 19.

The apostle Peter wrote this epistle to Christians in general, throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, with a principal design to encourage and animate them to perform the duties, and endure the trials of their pilgrimage on earth. Accordingly, he reminds them of their glorious hope of a future and eternal inheritance, reserved for them in heaven. He next turns their attention to their absent and invisible Redeemer, whom they had professed to love, and in whom they supremely rejoiced. But to make them more sensibly feel their strong and endearing obligations to pass the time of their sojourning here in fear, he tells them that they knew that they "were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." The paschal lamb was a type of Christ, and for this reason, when John saw Jesus coming to him, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" The paschal lamb was to be perfect, and without blemish. This was designed to denote the immaculate purity and moral perfection of the life of Christ. And this is what is meant in the text, by his being a lamb without blemish and without spot. But it is worthy of peculiar notice here, that the apostle does not intimate to Christians that they had been redeemed by his pure and spotless life, but *by his precious blood*, or vicarious death. It was not the perfect, unblemished form of the paschal lamb, that made the ceremonial atonement; nor was it the unblemished and unspotted obedience of Christ, that made the atonement for the sins of the world. The text, therefore, plainly teaches us,

That it was not the perfect obedience, but the blood of Christ, which made atonement for the sins of the world.

I shall show,

I. In what Christ's perfect obedience consisted.

II. That he made no atonement by his obedience. And,

III. That he did make a complete atonement by his blood.

I. I am to describe the obedience of Christ, or show in what it consisted. Christ repeatedly professed to be perfectly obedient. He said, "I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me." Again he said, "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." And the very day before his death, he said to his Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He was perfectly "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," through the whole course of his life. From the beginning to the end of his life, he never deviated from the path of duty in a single instance. For,

1. He perfectly obeyed the *moral* law, which required him to love both God and man. He actually and constantly loved God supremely, and he as constantly loved mankind with pure and perfect benevolence. When he was a child, he obeyed his parents. When he was a man, he obeyed the laws of the land, and gave to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's. He labored from day to day, and from year to year, in a lawful calling; and every day perfectly performed the duties of the day. He was indefatigably industrious, and labored even to weariness.

2. He perfectly obeyed the *ceremonial* law. He attended the passover with great punctuality and strictness. He submitted to be baptized by John, and urged this reason for it, that "it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." As a Jew, he was holden to observe all the rites and ceremonies of divine appointment; though he resolutely refused to obey the traditions of the elders, which were repugnant to the laws of God. But lest his refusing to observe the vain traditions which the Scribes and Pharisees so superstitiously observed, should be misinterpreted, he declared that he came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. He paid as strict a regard to every divine rite and ceremony, as to every precept of the moral law. Let him be in what part of Judea he would, he never failed to go up to the temple in Jerusalem three times in a year, after he was old enough to attend the passover. He likewise regularly attended the service of the temple and synagogue, and every religious institution enjoined by the laws of Moses.

3. He was no less obedient to the *mediatorial*, than to the moral and ceremonial law. The mediatorial law had respect

to him, and to him alone. This law required him to do many things which he was not required to do as a mere man, but only as mediator between God and man. It required him to preach the gospel to the poor, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And in obedience to this command, immediately after he was baptized, he went into the principal towns and cities in Judea, declaring the glad tidings of salvation, and calling upon sinners to repent and believe the gospel. And he continued in this sacred work for about three years and a half; though it seems he met with very little success among the stupid and self-righteous Jews. Another mediatorial precept required him to work miracles; and this precept he perfectly obeyed with peculiar tenderness and dignity. The miracles which he wrought, were not only very various and numerous, but very great and marvellous. He healed the sick, when present and when absent. He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the lame to walk, and the dead to rise and live. He dispossessed those who were possessed of evil spirits, and made the devils obey his voice. He commanded the winds and waves into silent submission. And without speaking a word, he miraculously multiplied a few barley loaves and a few fishes so as to satisfy the craving appetites of more than five thousand persons. And we are told, that he would have wrought many more miracles, had it not been for the prejudice and unbelief of his enemies. But after he had wrought so many miracles, and preached in so many places, the mediatorial law required him to perform a far more arduous, painful, and self-denying act of obedience; and that was to lay down his life, and be obedient even to the death of the cross. This commandment, he expressly says, he had received of his Father. He knew that his Father had appointed the time, the place, and the circumstances of his death. Accordingly, when the appointed time was come, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and there make his soul an offering for sin. Though the prospect of this awful event filled his soul with sorrow, and caused him to sweat as it were great drops of blood, and his agonies finally extorted the exclamation, "Eloi, eloi, lama, sabachthani,—My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" yet he submissively gave up the ghost, and became obedient even unto the cruel death of the cross. Thus Christ paid perfect obedience to every moral, ceremonial, and mediatorial precept, from the beginning to the end of his life. And in this respect, he was "as a lamb without spot and without blemish."

II. He made no atonement for sin by his perfect obedience.

It was neither designed nor adapted to make atonement for sin. For,

1. His obedience was not designed to make atonement, but for two other important purposes. It was necessary that he should be perfectly obedient to every moral, ceremonial, and mediatorial precept, in order to gain the approbation of his Father. Had he failed in obeying one precept of the moral law, God would have been displeased. Had he failed in obeying one precept of the ceremonial law, his Father would have been displeased. Or had he failed in obeying one precept of the mediatorial law, his Father would have been displeased. And had he forfeited the favor of his Father, and fallen under legal condemnation, he would have been totally incapable of performing the part of a mediator between God and his rebellious creatures. He would have needed a mediator himself, as much as mankind. His perfect obedience, therefore, was necessary on his own account, both as man and mediator. Besides, his obedience to the mediatorial law was necessary, to demonstrate to the world that he was the true and promised Messiah. God had foretold what the Messiah was to be and do; and had he not been and done what it was predicted he should be and do, it could not have been known that Jesus of Nazareth, who died on the cross, was the Saviour of the world. But the doctrines which he preached, and the miracles which he wrought, gave infallible evidence of his Divinity and Messiahship. Hence, Christ appealed to these as the highest credentials of his divine authority and mission. He did this, in answer to two of John's disciples, who said to him, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." This was as much as to say, that he was the true Messiah, who was both to preach and work miracles. When the Jews called his divine authority in question, he first appealed to the testimony of John concerning him, and immediately added, "But I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." And when his own disciples manifested their doubts respecting him, after his resurrection, he still appeals to his works, which he had done agreeably to the predictions concerning him. "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were

written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." Thus it was necessary that Christ should pay perfect obedience to all that God enjoined upon him as man, and as mediator, in order to secure the Divine approbation, and to manifest to the world that he was the true Messiah.

2. Christ's obedience was no more adapted than designed to make atonement. Who can suppose, that his obeying his parents, or his mechanical labor, or his preaching, or his working miracles, had the least tendency to atone for the sins of the world? Though his obedience to the moral, ceremonial, and mediatorial law, was absolutely perfect, yet no part of his obedience, nor the whole taken together, was in the least degree adapted to make atonement. We might as well suppose, that his wearing a seamless coat, or his washing his disciples' feet, could make atonement, as that any other part, or the whole of his perfect obedience, could make atonement. It has been the common opinion of all nations, that an atonement for sin must be made by some other method, than that of obedience. Christ's perfect obedience had, therefore, no tendency to make the atonement; but only to prepare and qualify him to make it; just as the perfect, unblemished form and figure of the paschal lamb, qualified that to make a ceremonial atonement. Accordingly, the apostle represents the spotless character of Christ as necessary to qualify him to perform the priest's office, which was to make atonement, by offering sacrifices. "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once, when he offered up himself." Here the apostle plainly intimates that Christ did not make atonement by his obedience, or his holy life; but by making his soul an offering for sin, or by the single act of his death. This leads me to show,

III. That Christ did make complete atonement for sin, by his blood. The atonement of Christ is sometimes called a price, a ransom, a redemption; or Christ is said to purchase, to ransom, or to redeem mankind. But by whatever name the atonement is called, it is expressly said to be made by blood, or by death, or by sufferings, in distinction from obedience. The apostle calls it "redemption," and ascribes it to the blood of Christ, in the text. He says to Christians, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." And in the second verse of the context, he represents the atonement as made by the sprinkling of the blood

of Jesus Christ. Paul represents the atonement as made by the blood, the death, and the sufferings of Christ on the cross. He says to believers, "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood." Again, he says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." If we now turn to the epistle to the Hebrews, we shall find that the apostle has most clearly determined, that it was the blood or death of Christ, that made the atonement. He there says, "Without shedding of blood is no remission." That is, nothing but shedding of blood can make atonement, or lay a foundation for pardon or remission of sin. He refers to Leviticus xvii. 11, where we read, "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." In this connection, the apostle repeatedly asserts, that it was by offering up himself once, that he made atonement for sin. "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands—neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Again, he says, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands—but into heaven itself—Nor yet that he should offer himself often. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." In all these passages, the apostle represents Christ as making atonement agreeably to the types under the Old Testament, which was by shedding of blood. And he plainly and repeatedly asserts, that Christ made atonement by *one* act, by *one* sacrifice, by *one* instance of suffering, by *one* death, by *once* shedding his blood. This confines his atonement to his blood, in distinction from his life of perfect obedience. And it is further to be observed, that the apostle in this epistle to the Hebrews, professes to explain both the types and predictions of Christ's atonement in the Old Testament. Daniel predicted, "That Messiah should be cut off, but not for himself." Isaiah predicted, that Christ should pour out his soul unto death, and make his soul an offering for sin. Caiphas predicted, that it was "expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." It was his idea of atonement, that it could be made only by death.

Now, that we have given the true sense of the passages cited, will appear, if we consider the *necessity* of an atonement, in order to God's consistently pardoning and saving sinners. The necessity of atonement was founded in the vindictive justice of God. It became God to manifest his perfect hatred of sin, and his disposition to punish it. He could not display mercy at the expense of justice. He must appear to be *just*, as well as merciful, in forgiving those who deserved to be punished. But how could this be done? God only knew how. He knew, that by the incarnation of the Second Person in the Godhead, he could be put in a situation to die for sinners, and by his death declare the righteousness of God, that he might be *just*, and the justifier of believing, penitent, returning sinners. Christ accordingly came into the world to give his "life a ransom for many"—to die "the just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God." Accordingly, as the apostle says in the text, he redeemed them by his precious blood. His blood made a complete atonement for sin, or rendered it consistent for a holy and just God to forgive and save perishing and ill-deserving sinners.

HEADS OF IMPROVEMENT.

1. We hence see why Christ instituted the sacrament as a memorial of his death alone. He did do this. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Now, if it was the death of Christ alone, that made atonement, then this ought to be remembered and celebrated in a peculiar manner.

2. If it was not the *obedience*, but the *blood* of Christ, that made atonement for sin, then nothing Christ did, or said, or suffered from his birth to the day of his death, or his last sufferings, was of a propitiatory, satisfactory, or atoning nature. Many divines have considered the whole life of Christ, from his birth to his death, as constituting the two parts of his atonement—or his *active* and *passive* obedience—his *satisfaction* to divine justice, and *his meriting* salvation for believers. But there appears no ground in scripture for the distinction between the *satisfaction* of Christ and the *merits* of Christ. It was impossible that he should merit anything from God, either as man or as mediator—either by his obedience, or by his suf-

ferings. The truth is, his *obedience* only *prepared* him to make atonement—his *blood made* it—and atonement did neither *satisfy* nor merit—it only rendered it consistent for God to show mercy.

3. If Christ did not make atonement by his obedience, but by his blood, then we may justly conclude, that what the scripture calls the righteousness of Christ, means the same as his suffering death—and nothing else.

4. If Christ made atonement by his blood, and not by his obedience, then that for which he was rewarded, was not that for which sinners are pardoned. They are pardoned for his death—but he was rewarded for his life, or his obedience, even unto death. This was acceptable to God—but was not the atonement.

5. If Christ made atonement by his *blood*, and not by his obedience, then his atonement has not dissolved or weakened the obligation of Christians to pay perfect obedience to the divine law. His obedience had no merits to procure their salvation.

6. If Christ has redeemed saints by his precious blood, then they are under great obligations to *love* him—to *obey* him—and to promote his cause.

7. If Christ has made complete atonement for the sins of the world, by his precious blood, then there is nothing to prevent sinners being saved, only their refusing to trust in Christ's blood for pardon and acceptance. This refusal must prevent their salvation—God cannot pardon and save them upon any other ground.

Let all inquire whether they have built their hopes upon the only sure foundation—the blood of Christ.

SERMON X.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

"And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned."—Luke, xxiii. 48.

Actions speak louder than words, especially when they flow from feelings too great for words to express. The spectators of the crucifixion of Christ, from whatever motives they attended, returned in slow and solemn step, smiting their breasts, in token of sensations too keen and pungent to be uttered. This was wholly owing to the *affecting* nature of the scene which they had been beholding. They probably went to gratify their eyes; but their eyes affected their hearts, and they returned with views and feelings which no other scene ever excited, and which no language could describe. Their minds were employed in deep and solemn reflections upon what they had seen. The meek and amiable appearance of Christ, his prayer for his enemies, his mournful address to his Father, and his expiring groans, absorbed their whole attention, and fixed all the powers of their minds in deep and solemn meditation upon an event, which was the most interesting and astonishing that had ever taken place in any part of the universe. They could not speak; they could only smite their heaving, laboring, and wounded breasts. From this we must conclude,

That the affecting scene of Christ's death must lead the mind into a train of very serious and important reflections.

The death of Christ was the most astonishing death that ever was seen in this dying world, where so many millions of the human race have breathed out their last. There was a variety of circumstances attending the death of the Lord of glory, which rendered it extremely affecting. There was a vast concourse of people collected together on the solemn occasion. The great city of Jerusalem was crowded with foreigners out

of every nation under heaven. The amazing scene opened at the time of a Jewish festival, which called the nation together, to celebrate the Passover. And though the death of a common person might have been less regarded at such a season, yet the death of the most remarkable person then in the world, would be much more regarded when the curiosity and interested feelings of immense numbers were excited. Christ had endeared himself to his disciples and intimate friends, who loved him to adoration. He had wrought a great many beneficent miracles, which had conciliated the affections of the common people. He had attacked and silenced the erroneous Scribes and Pharisees. He had made high pretensions to divinity, by forgiving sins, by raising the dead, and by declaring that he had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again. He had awakened the jealousy of both the civil and ecclesiastical powers, by proclaiming himself to be the Son of God, and professing to be about to set up a new kingdom among men. Not only all Jerusalem, but all Judea, felt deeply interested in the fate of such an extraordinary personage. This would naturally draw together persons of all characters, of all parties, and of all conditions, in vast multitudes, to see his death, and to mark everything that was said and done with the greatest sensibility and attention. And everything was said and done, to move every passion of human nature. The unprovoked malice, and virulence, and cruelty, and contempt that were poured upon the meek and lowly Jesus, were enough to create the highest indignation in every breast which had the least spark of humanity. But the conduct of Christ under all these indignities was still more astonishing and affecting. His mind was calm, his language was mild, and his heart was full of tenderness and forgiveness, while his whole body was suffering the keenest pains and tortures. Such a spectacle must have inspired the most unfeeling minds not only with admiration, but with sympathy and compassion. To heighten the solemn scene, and sensibility of all the surrounding spectators, the God of nature controlled the law of nature, and at noonday, spread a deep and solemn gloom over the face of the earth, more awful than Egyptian darkness. And to close the tremendous scene, Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost! Now every eye, and ear, and heart was full, and all the people that came together to witness that amazing sight, began to move slowly and solemnly, smiting their breasts for anguish of heart. But though they were not able to speak, yet they were able to think. A train of serious and interesting reflections flowed from the affecting scene, which never has

been and never will be erased from their minds, and which they have carried and will forever carry with them, whether they have been saved or lost. Let us now, therefore, while the scene is before us in description, seriously carry our thoughts to Calvary, and contemplate some of the great truths and objects which were exhibited by the crucifixion of Christ. And,

1. The crucifixion of Christ naturally leads the mind to reflect upon the mortal enmity of the human heart against God. This God had plainly declared in his word long before the death of Christ. The prophets under the Old Testament represent mankind as opposing God by their *external* disobedience to all his holy and righteous commands. But when Christ came, he more clearly and fully laid open the *internal* malignity and enmity of their hearts towards God. He represented them as serpents, a generation of vipers, possessing the very spirit of the first enemy of God and man. Few, however, would believe the representations of Christ or the prophets on the subject of total depravity. They highly resented what Christ said to them respecting their native enmity and opposition of heart to God. But their putting him to death on the cross, demonstrated the truth, they hated and denied. Christ was hated, opposed, and crucified, not for his humanity, but for his divinity. He claimed to be a divine person, and appealed to his works to justify his claim. He displayed his divinity by the miracles he wrought. He stilled the winds and the waves by his voice; and by his voice he gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the sick, and even life to the dead. By these mighty works he displayed his divine power. He told men their thoughts, and discovered their secret purposes and designs, by which he proved his omniscience; and he spake and acted as God, in repeatedly and publicly forgiving sins. Such displays and professions of divinity drew upon him the hatred and malice of the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he knew and declared to be mortal enemies to God. He at length gave them opportunity to demonstrate their mortal enmity. Though he was the Lord of glory, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe, he gave up himself into their hands. Then it appeared how men would treat God when left to act without restraint. They would scourge him with their hands, abuse him with their tongues, and pierce him to the heart with their spears; for they actually did all these things when they imbrued their hands in the blood of Him, who was with God, and was God. The Jews and Gentiles, who represented the whole world of sinners, killed the Prince of life, and acted out their mortal enmity against their great Creator. Had every

one of the human race stood at the cross, each individual might have seen his own heart, and known by the most shocking deed that ever was done, that he was a mortal enemy to his Maker. Every son and daughter of Adam has had a heart that would, if possible, destroy its Creator. On the cross, as in a mirror, we may see our natural malignity and mortal enmity, and the natural malignity and mortal enmity of all mankind against our rightful Lord and Sovereign. Are we better, by nature, than they who hated, opposed, and actually crucified the Lord of life? No, in no wise. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." The crucifixion of Christ by the wicked hands of men, demonstrates the mortal enmity of the human heart to God beyond all doubt or contradiction.

2. The death of Christ on the cross leads every one to reflect on what he deserves at the hand of divine justice. This is not what men are apt to realize, but let them approach the cross of Christ, and there read their righteous doom. God had threatened Adam with death for the least sin. His prophets, in his name, had threatened death to the least transgressor, saying, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." And Christ himself expressly told sinners that they deserved the damnation of hell. But this truth never appeared so clearly before as it did on the cross, while sinners were displaying the malignity and ill desert of sin by perpetrating the cruel and ignominious death of Christ. Nor is this all: at that awful hour God was holding up his Son in the agonies of death, and bleeding at every pore, in the view of the whole intelligent creation, to exhibit his sense of the infinite guilt and ill desert of sinners. By this conduct, he said to angels, men, and devils, "Behold my beloved Son extended on the cross; see his bleeding veins; hear his dying groans; and know, that vengeance is mine, and I will give my impenitent enemies a just recompense of reward." Christ stood in our place; God laid on him the iniquities of us all; he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him; and the stripes which he received we deserved. While every person looks at Christ, suffering the extremest pains and tortures, he is constrained to reflect upon what he has deserved at the hand of a holy and righteous God. Did Christ die? then every sinner deserves to die. Did Christ the Son of God suffer extreme pain and anguish for a few hours? then every sinner deserves to suffer future and eternal misery. In meditating on the suffering Saviour, every one is

led to look into hell, and see the due reward of his deeds. In the death of Christ, the justice of God shines brighter than it could have done by turning all nations into hell, and pouring upon them the vials of his wrath forever. In a dying Saviour, we may see that we deserve to die; and in a suffering Saviour, we may see that we deserve to suffer, without measure and without end.

3. The death of Christ should lead us to reflect upon the distinguishing grace of God, in giving his Son to die for our salvation. His love to sinners appears in his causing his sun to rise, and his rain to fall upon them, and loading them with the bounties of providence. His love also appears in the promises of good things to mankind, both before and since the coming of Christ; but we must turn our eyes to the cross, and contemplate the reproaches, the pains, and the agonies of his dearly beloved Son, dying in our nature and in our place, in order to form clear and just conceptions of his astonishing grace in sending him to seek and save them that are lost. God knew, when he formed the scheme of redemption, and ordained myriads of mankind to eternal life, that their salvation would require the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the Son of his love. He had a clearer view from eternity of the sufferings of Christ on the cross than any of the spectators had at the time of the tremendous scene. But yet he so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to die, that sinners might live. All his love to mankind from eternity unto eternity seemed to be concentrated to a point, when he unsheathed the sword of his justice and bathed it in the vicarious blood of his Son, for the salvation of sinners. This was love indeed, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" yea, says the apostle, "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Never was such love displayed in heaven, and never was such love displayed on earth, before or since the day that Christ bled on the cross. While we have the scenes of the crucifixion before our minds, can we refrain from admiring the love of God the Father in the unspeakable gift of his Son to this guilty and miserable world!

4. By the death of Christ we are sensibly led to reflect upon his boundless love to sinners. He knew what he must do and suffer, when he undertook to save them from their sins, and restore them to the favor of their injured and offended Sovereign. All the while he was upon earth, he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows on his tender heart. While the world were unconscious of his gracious design, and total strangers to his ap-

preaching sufferings, he constantly anticipated the day and the hour of his darkness and death on the cross. And as the appointed and anticipated time drew nearer and nearer, the awful scene pressed heavier and heavier on his troubled breast. But his love to God and man was stronger than death. "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." With such ardent and benevolent feelings, he went into the garden, where he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, and prayed again, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." He now girded up the loins of mind and magnanimously met his betrayer and his murderers; he undauntedly stood before Pilate; he meekly sustained the wounds and insults of his enemies; he patiently carried his cross; and finally made his soul an offering upon it. Thus Christ on the cross acted out all that love to sinners, which he had professed to feel for them before he died. He had said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." And the apostle says, "When we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die;" but Christ died for his mortal enemies, who actually imbrued their hands in his blood. Here we see the length and breadth, the height and depth of that love, which passeth all understanding. What love was this? was it human love? was it angelic love? No, it was love divine, and of love divine the highest possible expression. Pause, ponder, and reflect to see

"Extended Deity on human weal."

5. The death of Christ brings into view the vast worth of the human soul. Christ died to save the souls of men from eternal death. How precious then must the souls of men be, which he was willing to redeem by his blood! He taught the value of the soul in his preaching. He put the solemn question to his hearers, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" But his death speaks louder than his words. When he hung expiring on the cross, he proclaimed to the world, and even to the universe, the infinite worth and importance of the souls of men. No description of the soul, no declarations of its worth, and no representation of its final state, could give such an impressive sense of its value, as Christ's giving up his own precious life to redeem it. How did that cross which debased the Lord of glory, magnify and exalt the

souls of men! How did it raise the human race in the eyes of principalities and powers, and the whole intelligent universe! We cannot conceive how Christ could have exhibited the souls of men in so important a light, in any other way, as by giving himself a ransom to redeem them.

6. The death of Christ unfolds the depths of divine wisdom in devising, adopting, and executing the glorious work of redemption. Who could have thought, that the glory of God, the happiness of man, and the great interests of the universe, could have been promoted by such an awful event as the crucifixion of Christ. But God from eternity saw, that just such a scene, with all the sin, and pain, and sorrow, which were then displayed, would spread light, and joy, and holiness through heaven and earth, and augment the blessedness of all holy beings to all eternity. Great is the mystery of godliness! God manifest in the flesh! "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" He gave his Son to die; he gave power to his enemies to put him to death; and he gave opportunity to thousands of visible and invisible spectators to see the awful deed perpetrated, to the intent, that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known his manifold wisdom in his eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. In this great, extensive, and glorious plan of redemption, angels and men may contemplate the manifold wisdom of God, forever; for it will be forever unfolding more and more, until all the great and happy effects of it shall cease to flow, and are fully comprehended, by those who have delighted and always will delight in looking into it.

7. The crucifixion of Christ naturally leads the mind to reflect on the dismal state of those who shall be lost. If such things were done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry? If the God of mercy could subject his dear, innocent Son to such appalling sufferings, who can conceive the dreadful miseries, which he will inflict on his guilty and incorrigible enemies! It was one principal design that God had in view in crucifying his Son, to show to the whole universe how he felt towards sin, and how much he was disposed to punish it. The death of Christ makes it as certain that he will finally punish the *impenitent*, as that he will finally pardon and save the *penitent*. How then can those escape future and eternal misery, who neglect so great salvation as Christ has provided for them by his death, and offered to them in the gospel?

8. The crucifixion of Christ leads all true believers to confide in all the great and precious promises, which God has

made to them that love him. "We know," says the apostle, "that all things work together for good to them that love God. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" After the gift of Christ to believers, they have no room to doubt of his giving them any other gift which he has promised, or which will be most for his glory, and for their good, in time and eternity.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since the affecting scene of Christ's crucifixion is calculated to suggest a train of serious and solemn reflections, the sacrament is a very trying ordinance. It is better adapted to try the hearts of communicants, than any other religious ordinance. Reading the Bible, hearing the gospel, and calling upon God, are religious duties, which are suited to try the heart; but the mind may more easily attend to any or all of these duties without deep meditation and sensibility, than to sit at the table of Christ, which necessarily brings his crucifixion into view, and the glorious and awful consequences which might follow. These great, solemn, and interesting objects will find their way to the heart, and sensibly excite either right or wrong affections there. On this account the sacrament is trying *before* attendance. Professors cannot anticipate the solemn occasion without hope or fear, joy or dread of meeting Christ and his friends at his table. It is for this reason, every one is required to examine himself before he partakes of the Lord's supper, and determine whether he is worthy to eat of that bread, and to drink of that cup, which is a standing memorial of the body and blood of Christ. And if every communicant would seriously and critically examine the workings of his heart in the anticipation of coming to communion, he might form a very just opinion, whether he is, or is not prepared for that solemn duty. But if any neglect the previous examination of their hearts, yet when they come to commemorate the crucifixion of Christ, they will then be tried, whether they desire to be so, or not. They will sensibly experience love, joy, gratitude, and hope; or else stupidity, ingratitude, enmity and opposition to Christ, to his friends, and to his cause. They must feel, and feel right or wrong, and draw a conclusion whether they are, or are not heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. And when they leave the communion table, they will

go away as the spectators of the crucifixion did, with sorrowful, or joyful reflections, which will continue to try their hearts. Though non-professors may imagine, that the sacrament is an unmeaning and trivial ceremony, yet all professors, whether sincere, or insincere, know by experience, that it is a very serious, searching, and interesting ordinance. It displays the justice and mercy of God in the face of Christ, and the sole foundation of pardon and salvation, upon which believers build their future and eternal hopes. It strips all the impenitent and unbelieving of all their self-righteousness, and throws them upon the unpromised mercy of God. It is extremely interesting to saints, to have their hopes of eternal life confirmed; and it is no less interesting to sinners, to have their hopes of eternal life destroyed. All communicants know that their future and eternal hopes are tried, are confirmed, or are destroyed, by commemorating the death of Christ, which renders the ordinance above all others, trying, interesting, and solemn.

2. Since the contemplation of Christ's crucifixion has a direct and powerful tendency to suggest a train of serious and interesting reflections, it is peculiarly suited to promote the growth of grace in the hearts of all sincere Christians. It is only in the view of some spiritual and divine objects, that they ever exercise holy and divine affections. It is only in the view of the character, perfections, designs, and operations of God, that they exercise holy and devout affections towards *him*. It is only in the view of the character, conduct, and sufferings of Christ, that they exercise holy and right affections towards *him*. It is only in the view of the character, perfections, and official work of the Holy Ghost, that they exercise holy and proper affections towards *him*. And this is true of every holy and benevolent affection, that it is always exercised towards some object in the view of the mind. It was in the view of God, that Job exercised the deepest humiliation and self-abasement. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It was in the view of God as sitting on a throne high and lifted up, surrounded by a train of the heavenly hosts, that Isaiah was constrained to view and acknowledge his own vileness and insignificance. It was while the disciples of Christ were freely conversing about his crucifixion and resurrection, and while he, beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself, that their hearts *burned* within them with love, gratitude, and joy. All the great and glorious objects which Job, Isaiah, and the disciples saw and heard, are brought into view

at the commemoration of Christ's crucifixion; and suited to awaken in the hearts of the communicants the same solemn, holy, and delightful affections. How often have true believers exercised peculiar love to God, to Christ, to his friends, and to his cause, while sitting round his table? How often have they in the same situation, exercised a lively faith in the great and precious promises of the gospel? How often have they exercised deep humiliation and self-abasement for wounding Christ in the house of his friends, and seriously resolved to obey every intimation of his will in time to come? How often have they carried their views and hearts to heaven, and joyfully anticipated the enjoyments and employments of the spirits of just men made perfect? The sacrament is every way adapted to exhibit such truths and objects as have a happy tendency to draw forth every holy, devout affection of the pious heart; and consequently to promote the edification, comfort, and fruitfulness of every real Christian. This has been realized by those who have constantly attended the Lord's supper. They have found themselves encouraged, strengthened, and assisted in pursuing their Christian course. And those who have been denied this privilege, have deeply lamented the want of this means of the growth of grace. All the sincere friends of Christ see the wisdom and the grace of Christ, in requiring them to celebrate the memorials of his death, and esteem it a great privilege, that they may attend an ordinance so peculiarly adapted to revive their languishing graces, and to animate and strengthen them in every duty, and to support them in every trial.

3. As the celebration of the memorials of Christ's crucifixion has a happy tendency to promote the growth of grace in the hearts of true believers, so it has a no less unhappy tendency to harden the hearts of *insincere professors*. All great truths, great objects, and great events, have a tendency to produce a softening, or hardening effect upon the heart. The crucifixion of Christ had a softening effect on some, and a hardening effect on others. The heart of his mother, and the hearts of his brethren, and of his friends, and of his sincere disciples, were melted into benevolence, sympathy, and compassion, while beholding his sufferings and death. But we know that this solemn scene had a hardening effect on the hearts of his enemies. "And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also, the chief priests *mocking him*, with the scribes and elders, said,

He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also which were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth." Since the crucifixion of Christ had such different and opposite effects on the hearts of the actual spectators of it, it seems natural to conclude, that it must have different and opposite effects upon the hearts of those who commemorate it. As it tends to soften the hearts of sincere believers, so it equally tends to harden the hearts of *insincere professors*. They are not pleased with the character of Christ, nor with his doctrines, nor with the great benevolent design which he is pursuing, and which is directly opposed to all their selfish desires, designs, and pursuits. They are not *with* him, but *against* him. They do not love him, but hate him. And the contemplation of any hated object always tends to increase hatred towards it. Insincere professors come to the table of Christ with reluctance, they sit at the table of Christ with reluctance, and go away more confirmed and hardened in their enmity and opposition to him, than they came. There is nothing which has a greater tendency to harden their hearts, to alienate them from the friends of Christ, to unite them to the men of the world, and to lead them to the neglect of every religious duty. It is very strange, therefore, that any suppose, that the sacrament is a converting ordinance to sinners. It is, of all religious ordinances, the most *un*converting and *hardening*. Do not some insincere professors give too much evidence, that this has been the unhappy effect of their joining the church, and commemorating the memorials of Christ's death? But if some insincere professors have not exhibited this effect to the view of the world, have they not felt it in their own minds? Have they not found that, instead of growing in *grace*, they have grown in *stupidity*, by coming to the communion table? That, instead of becoming more punctual, they have become less punctual in attending public worship? That, instead of keeping their hearts with more diligence, they have been less diligent in keeping them? That, instead of being more united to the church, they have become less united to it? That, instead of being more engaged to promote the cause of Christ, they have become less engaged to promote it? And that, instead of finding their profession a benefit, they have found it a burden? Are they not conscious that these unhappy, hardening effects have actually resulted from their partaking of the Lord's supper unworthily? Hence,

4. There must be something extremely criminal in partaking of the symbols of the body and blood of Christ, with unholy views and affections. This all insincere professors are guilty of, while sitting around his table, where he is evidently set forth as crucified before their eyes. They symbolize with those spectators of his crucifixion, who reviled and insulted him in his agonies on the cross. While contemplating his superlative love, and grace, and condescension, in his incarnation, obedience, sufferings and death, which call for their admiration, love, gratitude, and praise, they sit with hearts full of unbelief, impenitence, and ingratitude. Such feelings towards Christ are always sinful, but much more criminal, while they are professedly commemorating the astonishing scene of his crucifixion with his friends, who, at the same time, are gratefully and joyfully admiring the wonders of his grace. If they did not take peculiar pains to harden their hearts and stupify their consciences on communion day, they must painfully realize, that while partaking the sacramental elements, they were eating and drinking judgment to themselves. They may, however, have become so stupid as to have no such painful reflections, in the time of their unworthily partaking of the Lord's supper. But, if they ever do seriously and impartially review their past sinful views and feelings, they will be convinced that they contracted their greatest guilt while sitting at the table of Christ. There they crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and did despite to the spirit of grace. This is a scripture representation of insincere professors, and of the aggravated guilt they contract, by their unholy, ungrateful, and hostile feelings towards the glorious and divine Redeemer, who came, and suffered, and died for them, that they might escape the wrath to come. This description ought not to deter any from professing Christ, and commemorating his dying love, whose hearts are right with God, and united to Christ as the branches are to the vine.

5. It appears from this subject, that those who are qualified to commemorate the death of Christ on earth, are really qualified for the enjoyments and employments of heaven. The death of Christ will be commemorated there, by all who are redeemed from among men, and afford them the highest satisfaction and enjoyment. John, in vision, heard them sing and say, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever." Again he said, "I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on mount Zion,

and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sang as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song, but the hundred and forty and four thousand who were redeemed from the earth." And again he said, "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." All who sincerely and joyfully commemorate the death of Christ, shall finally be admitted to heaven, where they shall unite with the general assembly and church of the first born, in celebrating the marriage supper of the Lamb, which will afford them unspeakably greater felicity than they ever enjoyed at the communion table on earth. The sacrament is not a converting ordinance; but it is an ordinance designed and suited to sanctify and qualify all real converts for the enjoyments and employments of heaven. All who are qualified to enjoy communion with Christ and his friends on earth are qualified to celebrate the death of their divine Redeemer in the kingdom of glory. Hence,

6. All who are disqualified for commemorating the death of Christ, are equally disqualified for entering into the kingdom of heaven. It appears from the very nature of duly commemorating the death of Christ, that all men in the state of nature, who are enemies to God, to Christ, and to his friends, are totally unfit to commemorate the death of Christ, and hold communion with him and his sincere followers; and of course, they are unfit to hold communion with him and them in heaven. Christ appointed the sacrament of his supper for the edification and comfort of his cordial friends. He requires them to separate themselves from the men of the world, and unitedly hold communion with him, and one another at his table. And at the same time forbids all others, who have not the wedding garment, to come with them. He appointed the sacrament on purpose to draw a line of distinction and separation between saints and sinners, his friends and his enemies. His friends at his table exhibit a visible distinction between them and his enemies, and visibly *presage* their future and eternal distinction and separation. The doctrines of total depravity and special

grace are clearly, visibly, and solemnly exhibited before the eyes of all impenitent, and unbelieving sinners. Christ practically says to all his enemies, every sacrament day, that, if they continne impenitent and unbelieving, he will finally shut them out of heaven, and consign them to an everlasting separation from himself, from his friends, and from all good. If his enemies only realized this, would they so often look down with contempt upon him and his friends at his table? Would they not tremble at the thought of being eternally separated from a pious father, a pious mother, a pious brother, a pious sister, or a pious child? How many are there who know, and are willing to own, that they are unqualified to come to the table of the Lord, and to hold communion with him and his friends, that seem not to know and allow that they are equally unqualified for heaven. Is it not time for such to awaken out of their stupidity and self-inconsistency, and realize the tremendous consequences of a final and eternal separation from heaven and happiness? As I am not declaiming, but speaking the words of truth and soberness, I will recapitulate to you what Christ has said on this solemn and momentous subject. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil: for *our* lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor hour wherein the Son of man cometh." Hear what Christ has further to say on this interesting subject. "When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eat and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell

you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and *you yourselves thrust out.*" Does it not deeply concern every *insincere* professor, and every *impenitent non-professor*, to attend immediately to the things that belong to his everlasting peace, before the door of mercy is shut?

SERMON XI.

CHRIST ALTOGETHER LOVELY.

"Yea, he is altogether lovely."—Solomon's Song, v. 16.

This book is a sacred dialogue between Christ and the church, in which Christ sets forth the beauty of the church, and the church displays the loveliness of Christ. In the close of this chapter, the church undertakes to describe the personal beauties of Christ, and after exhausting the force of language, she concludes with saying, "Yea, he is altogether lovely." This is a description of Christ in his mediatorial character; for in this character only his peculiar and supreme loveliness consists. As God, he is Creator, Governor, Lawgiver, and Judge. But these are great, and glorious, and awful, rather than lovely characters. Loveliness arises from goodness, rather than greatness; and especially from that goodness which communicates and diffuses happiness. Kindness, tenderness, and compassion, are the distinguishing qualities of a Saviour, Deliverer, and Redeemer. And these amiable qualities, which Christ, as Mediator, most eminently displays, diffuse a peculiar and superlative loveliness over his whole character, and render him "the chiefest among ten thousand," and "altogether lovely." Hence the supreme loveliness of Christ as the Mediator, is the subject which now properly lies before us. And this we shall attempt to illustrate, by taking a particular survey of his mediatorial conduct. And here I would observe,

1. That Christ is lovely in undertaking the work of redemption. From the early days of eternity, he foresaw the fallen and perishing state of Adam and all his posterity. He knew they could not be saved without a ransom, which no other person in the universe could give, but himself. And this ransom he knew must be his own precious blood. In this most trying case he steps forward and says, Lord, here am I—"I de-

light to do thy will"—lay the iniquities of the world upon me, and by my stripes let them be healed. Such love, pity, compassion, and condescension, were actually displayed at the moment when Christ consented to the covenant of redemption, and accepted the office of Mediator. He then, in the form of God, voluntarily engaged to take the form of man, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And he tells us the pleasure he felt in acting such a lovely part towards the most unlovely creatures. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." How lovely must that person appear, who could look forward millions of ages, and behold a world created to fall, and to rise again by his own sufferings and death! "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But greater love Christ felt and manifested, when he cheerfully undertook to lay down his life for his enemies.

2. Christ is lovely in taking upon him human nature. This was the first step he took to accomplish the work of redemption. After angels were created, and man was formed, the Mediator remained unrevealed. Neither angels nor man knew anything of that great and astonishing design which had laid in his mighty mind for millions of ages. But as soon as man had fallen, and plunged himself and posterity in hopeless ruin, then the glorious and amiable Mediator is brought into view, and his purposes of grace, in a measure, unfolded. When neither men nor angels could find a ransom, then God exhibited his own Son as the appointed ransom for sinners. But still he lay in the bosom of the Father four thousand years, until the dreadful effects of the fall had been clearly seen, and sensibly felt; and till the necessity of an atonement had been fully proved, and all things were ready for its accomplishment. Then the Lord of glory condescended to be born, and to veil his divinity with our humanity. This was a most amiable act of condescension and grace. It appeared so to the angels of light, who accompanied him in his descent from heaven to earth, and who appeared to the shepherds, and celebrated his incarnation with songs of praise. "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And

suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." For a man to be willing to become a worm, is nothing in comparison with the condescension of Christ, in being willing to become a man. Accordingly, the apostle represents this act of humiliation in the most striking language. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." What is more lovely than for greatness to stoop to littleness, and the Creator to his creatures, and assume their nature?

3. Christ is amiable in his private life. He lived about thirty years in obscurity and retirement. But from his childhood to that period of life, he displayed a lovely assemblage of divine and human excellencies. As he grew in stature, he increased in wisdom, and in favor with God and man. His filial obedience; his fervent devotion; his instructive conversation; his unspotted purity; his universal and perfect benevolence, commanded the love of some, the astonishment of others, and the esteem of all. He lived as never a child lived, as never a man lived before him. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." He was "altogether lovely."

4. Christ was lovely in his public character. As he began to be about thirty years of age, he was baptized of John in Jordan, when the Spirit of God descended upon him in the form of a dove, a proper emblem of his loveliness. From that period, he went about doing good. He healed the sick, cured the lame, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead. The view of distress always drew forth the compassion of his heart. His conversation was entertaining, instructive, and saving. When he preached, the multitudes flocked together to hear him, and were astonished at the gracious words which proceeded out of his lips. Everything which he did and said, among the joyful, among the mournful, among the rich, and among the poor, was altogether lovely.

5. Christ appears lovely in his preparation for death. He knew the time when, the place where, and all the circumstances under which he must die. His hour being come, he made peculiar preparations for dying. Having directed his disciples where to prepare the passover, he sits down with them, and celebrates that sacred ordinance with peculiar marks of condescension and grace. He allows them all to sit around

him, and one to lean on his breast. After this service was finished, he instituted and celebrated the memorials of his own death. Next he takes a towel and girds himself, and washes and wipes his disciples' feet, to teach them humility, condescension, and benevolence. After this, he enters into a free and familiar conversation with them. He exhorts them to love one another. He tells them that he is going to leave them, in order to prepare a place for them; and that when he has prepared a place for them, he will come again, and receive them to himself. He forewarns them of the hatred of the world, and the scenes of trouble, affliction, and distress before them. But at the same time, promises to send them the Comforter, who should instruct, strengthen, and support them. He more fully brings into view his own tremendous sufferings, and the great trial which they would experience, while the shepherd should be smitten, and the flock scattered. And he shuts up this tender, and lovely, and affecting scene, by that pathetic prayer which is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John. Could any person behave in a more amiable, lovely manner, than Christ behaved on this solemn and important occasion? Every word and action speaks condescension, tenderness, and love. With the cross in his eye, and the whole human race in his heart, he moves and speaks with inexpressible calmness, serenity, and tenderness, which at once displays superlative greatness and loveliness.

6. Christ appears lovely in his sufferings. When he had done conversing and praying with his disciples, they all went into the garden, where he took Peter, James, and John, and began to be exceeding sorrowful. He went forward a little way, and prayed, saying, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." This he repeated three times. And this was the highest possible expression of the tenderness and submission of his heart. Though he sweat as it were great drops of blood; though his whole frame was thrown into agonies by a view of his tremendous sufferings, yet, with unreserved submission to his Father's will, he was ready to endure them. It is not strange, that he who wept at the grave of Lazarus; at the approaching destruction of Jerusalem; and who was grieved at the sinner's hardness of heart, should most sensibly feel his own excruciating sufferings. And the submission which he expressed, was great in proportion to the pain and anguish he felt in the view of the trying scenes before him. Such submission under such circumstances appears extremely lovely, and sheds a superior glory upon his subsequent conduct. For after he had given vent to his grief, he resumes all his fortitude and seren-

ity, and cheerfully resigns himself into the hands of his enemies, though he could have sent them into eternity as easily as he recalled Lazarus from the grave. While he is in their cruel hands, he is as patient as a lamb; and as a sheep is dumb before the shearer, he opens not his mouth. When reviled, he reviles not again. When he is falsely accused, inhumanly insulted, shamefully reproached, and cruelly abused, he threateneth not, but commits himself to him that judgeth righteously. With astonishing kindness, and with no less astonishing firmness, he asserts his divine nature, and his divine authority; while, with more than human patience, he submits to the sentence of the ignominious death of the cross. For more than twelve hours, without intermission, he endures the indignity of judges, the reproach of priests, the violence of soldiers, and the insults of an enraged rabble. How beautiful is virtue in distress! How lovely does the meek and lowly Jesus appear in this dreadful scene of sufferings!

7. Christ is amiable in his death. It is a great thing to die an easy and common death, but still greater to die in such a cruel and extraordinary manner as Christ died. All the art and malice of man was exerted to render his death dreadful and distressing. And God in his providence seemed to gratify the wishes of his crucifiers, in adding unknown horrors to the tragical scene. But all these only served to display the superlative loveliness of Christ in his death. Behold the lovely man bending under the weight of his own cross! Behold him walking in silent submission, amidst the cruel reproaches of insulting murderers! Behold him arrived at the fatal place, where his cross is erected, and he, in the midst of two vile malefactors, is extended upon it, in the keenest agonies of distress! Now the heavens are involved in darkness, and a solemn pause ensues. This is the time for the suffering Saviour to display his supreme loveliness. Forsaken of his friends, reproached by the ungodly world, and reviled by his fellow-sufferers, he gives the most signal tokens of his infinite tenderness and compassion. After the darkened heavens and trembling earth had stilled the noise and clamor of the multitudes, and their minds were prepared to hear the voice of the dying Saviour, he lifts up the voice of prayer and supplication for them, and cries, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." This act of compassion is soon followed by a more surprising act of pardoning mercy. One of the malefactors is struck with conviction, and brought to repentance, and upon the brink of destruction prays to the Lord of glory for salvation. The bleeding and atoning Saviour hears his prayer, and admits him to heaven.

"To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." In the exercise of such astonishing kindness and mercy, the dear Immanuel closes the scene of life, and gives up the ghost. This renders him altogether lovely in his death.

8. Christ is lovely in all his conduct after his resurrection. He soon burst the bands of death, and triumphed over the grave. On the morning of his own day, he appears first to Mary, and accosts her with ineffable tenderness. Next he appears to the two disciples going to Emmaus; and converses with them in such a tender, instructive, and endearing manner, as filled their hearts with the warmest emotions of pleasure and joy. After this, he appears to the twelve, and in condescension to their blindness and weakness, gives them the strongest testimonials of his resurrection, by showing them his hands and his feet, which had been nailed to the cross. And from this time he took up his residence among his disciples, "being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." How lovely was it in Christ, after he had finished the great work of the atonement, and suffered every indignity from an ungrateful and malignant world, to prolong his residence upon the earth, for the sake of enlightening and comforting his few friends and followers. Then they knew he was the Lord of glory, and had all power in heaven and earth lodged in his hands. Then they knew, that all he had said, and done, and suffered, was the effect of his infinite condescension and grace, in becoming the Saviour of sinners. With what astonishment and pleasure did they converse with him about the spread, and prosperity, and glory of his spiritual kingdom! And how infinitely lovely does he appear, in the midst of this lovely circle of tried friends, who were waiting to become heralds of the glad tidings of salvation to a stupid and perishing world.

9. Christ is lovely in his ascension. After he had worn out a short and painful life in the service of God, and for the good of man; after he had conquered death and the grave, and brought life and immortality to light; and after he had settled all the affairs of his kingdom, he prepares to leave this dreadful world, and return to the world of light, and take his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, amidst the praises of saints and angels. As his entrance into the world was attended with an escort of angels, so his departure is honored by the presence of those superior beings. He calls his disciples to meet him at Mount Olivet, on the day of his ascension. They all come; and after he had given them all the information they desired, and after he had authorized them to preach his ever-

lasting gospel to all nations, he left them in a visible manner. "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." But he left eleven of his ministering servants behind, to acquaint the gazing and astonished spectators, that he should certainly return again, in the same manner, in which they had seen him go up to heaven. All these circumstances of his ascension, display the tenderness of his heart towards the human race.

10. Christ is lovely in his intercession for his people, at the right hand of God. Though he has left, yet he has not forgotten this world. He bears all his friends, and all whom his Father has given him, on his heart. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." What astonishing condescension and grace appears in the intercession of Christ. While all heaven are directing their prayers and praises to him, he is offering up his prayers for his poor, weak, suffering followers on earth. He thinks it not enough to die for them, but in addition to his expiring agonies, offers up his all-prevailing intercessions for their perseverance in holiness, and safe arrival to the mansions of bliss.

Lastly, Christ appears lovely in the preparations which he is making, for the final and complete happiness of all his chosen ones. God has given him to be "head over all things to the church." He has committed all power in heaven and earth into his hands. He has given him the supreme disposal of all things, until the consummation of the great work of redemption. Christ sits as King of Zion. And Zion is the object which lies nearest to his heart. He is governing all things in reference to his church, which he means to make the perfection of beauty and of blessedness. All the dispensations of his providence are expressions of love and tenderness towards Zion, which he hath set as a seal upon his heart, and upon his arm. Accordingly he told his disciples at his parting interview, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." How beautiful, how amiable is Christ in this part of his conduct. "Yea, he is altogether lovely."

HEADS OF IMPROVEMENT.

1. We learn from this subject that Christ is more amiable than any other person in the universe. There is a greater mixture of amiable qualities uniting in him, than in any other person. All human and divine excellencies unite in his person and character. Besides, all Christ's amiable qualities have been more clearly exhibited than those of any other person. He has been placed in a situation, in which no other person ever was, or ever will be placed. And situation is necessary to display amiable qualities.

2. We learn from what has been said, that the truth of Christianity is necessarily connected with the existence and loveliness of Christ. If there existed such a person as the sacred writers represent Christ to be, then his person and character runs through the whole Bible, and connects every part of it, from beginning to end. Admit the fact, that such a person existed, suffered, and died, and all other facts recorded will be established, and the whole scripture history and doctrines will be supported.

3. Is Christ altogether lovely? Then all who have hated, and opposed him, have done it without a cause. He was hated and opposed while he was upon the earth, and has been since he took the government of the world upon himself. But there never has been any reason or cause, why he should be hated and opposed.

4. Is Christ altogether lovely? Then it must be highly displeasing to God, for men to despise and oppose this most exalted personage. It is so represented in scripture. And there is a good reason for it. Despising Christ is really despising all God's works and designs, which all meet in the Son of his love. Set Christ out of view, and there is nothing in God's works and designs, worthy of himself.

5. Is Christ altogether lovely? Then communion with Christ must tend to make his followers lovely. It had this effect upon his first disciples. Others "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

6. Is Christ altogether lovely? Then his personal presence will be an ever-increasing source of divine happiness to the redeemed in heaven. His loveliness will ever be unfolding.

SERMON XII.

MELCHISEDEC.

"But made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually."—Hebrews, vii. 3.

Christ crucified was not only foolishness to the Greeks, but a stumbling-block to the Jews. The Greeks had no religion of divine institution to oppose to the gospel of Christ. They could only reason against it; and according to their unenlightened and unsanctified reason, it appeared to them foolishness. But the Jews had a divine religion to oppose to the doctrines and institutions of Christ. They said they knew that God spake unto Moses, and that all the laws, rites, and ceremonies which he had delivered to them, were of divine authority. They supposed, therefore, that they had a right to reject Christ, or any other person, who should introduce a new religion, different from that which they had already received from heaven. And upon this ground they actually stoned Stephen, because he taught that Christ had introduced a new dispensation, and set aside the rites and ceremonies instituted by Moses. Some said, "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." They supposed it was blasphemy for Christ, or any other man, to speak against those rites and ceremonies, which they knew came from God. For they could not easily believe that God would repeal his own laws, or abolish his own religion. The apostles, therefore, took a good deal of pains to remove this stumbling-block out of the minds of the Jews; but after all their preaching upon it, the apostle Paul found it necessary to write upon the subject. And it is the great design of this epistle to the Hebrews, or Jewish converts, to illustrate the connection, harmony, and consistency

between the Old Testament and New. The method he takes for this purpose, is to make it appear that the history, the rites, and ceremonies of the Old Testament, all point to, and centre in, Christ, who was God and man in two distinct natures, and one person forever. Accordingly, in the first chapter he proves the Divinity of Christ. In the second chapter he proves the Humanity of Christ. In the third chapter he shows that Christ, as Mediator, is superior to Moses. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters, he illustrates the priesthood of Christ; and represents him as superior to all the priests under the Law. To make this appear, he says he was of a higher order than they, even of the order of Melchisedec. Having mentioned Melchisedec in the last verse of the sixth chapter, he begins this seventh chapter with a particular description of his person, character, and office. "For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." This is the connection of the text. And in speaking upon it, I shall,

I. Inquire who Melchisedec is. And,

II. Show that he abideth a priest continually.

I. Let us inquire who Melchisedec is. Here it may be observed,

1. There is no evidence of his being a mere man. I know that most readers and interpreters of scripture have taken him to be one of the natural descendants of Adam. Some have supposed him to be Noah. Some have supposed him to be Shem. And some have believed him to be an eminently pious king and priest of Canaan. I shall not inquire which of these particular opinions is most probable; but only inquire whether there be any evidence of his being a mere man. We shall, therefore, only consider that portion of scripture which seems to favor the opinion of his being a mere man. It is said, he appears to be a mere man from the first account given of him in the fourteenth of Genesis. Let us turn to that chapter, and read the account there given of him. After mentioning Abraham's return from the slaughter of the kings, the sacred writer goes on to say, "And Melchisedec king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most

high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all." If this passage had not been explained by the apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews, it would seem to favor the opinion of Melchisedec's being a mere man; but yet it would afford no clear evidence of it. For Abraham was as much a king and priest as Melchisedec, if he were a mere man; and one priest never paid tithes to another priest of a different nation. It is true, indeed, the priests under the law paid tithes to the high-priest. But it does not appear that Melchisedec was a high-priest. Hence the circumstance of Abraham paying tithes to Melchisedec destroys the seeming evidence of his being a mere man. Besides, we know that the Amorites, a people devoted to destruction for their idolatry, possessed Salem and the whole land of Canaan in the days of Abraham. And who can think it probable, that such an idolatrous and devoted people had a man at the head of them, who was a king and priest of superior piety and dignity to Abraham, the friend of God?

It is said, Melchisedec is expressly called a man. The apostle says, "Consider how great *this man was*, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils." To this it may be sufficient to reply, Melchisedec might be a man, but not a *mere man*. Christ, we know, was a man, though not a *mere* man; and, for aught that yet appears, Melchisedec might be so.

But it is further said, that Melchisedec must be a mere man, because he is represented as being *like* Christ, and Christ is represented as being *like* him. In the text it is said, "Melchisedec was made like unto the Son of God." And Christ is said to be a priest "after the order of Melchisedec." But if Melchisedec were Christ, it is asked, how could he be said to be *like* Christ, and Christ said to be like him? Hence it is supposed he was a mere man. This mode of reasoning is much more plausible than solid. We read in the next chapter to the text, that "when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware *by himself*." If Melchisedec were Christ, it was proper to say he was "made like unto the Son of God," and the Son of God was made like unto him. It is generally supposed by divines, that Christ appeared in a visible form to the ancient patriarchs, and in particular to Abraham. He sometimes appeared as a prophet, and sometimes as a priest. When Abraham was returning from the slaughter of the kings, he appeared to him as the *priest* of the most high God. This appearance was a type of his appear-

ance after his incarnation, when he was made a priest after the order of Melchisedec, the priest of the most high God. If Melchisedec were Christ, then Christ was Melchisedec; and there is no absurdity in Christ being compared with himself, in two different conditions and appearances. As Melchisedec he appeared as Jesus of Nazareth, and as Jesus of Nazareth he appeared as Melchisedec. And since there never was any human priest who exactly resembled Christ, it was proper to compare him before his incarnation, to himself after his incarnation. On the whole, there is no evidence in scripture of Melchisedec's being a mere man. I now proceed a step further, and observe,

2. There is evidence in scripture of his being *more* than man. This appears from the description which the apostle gives of him in the text and context. One part of the description is this: that he was "without father, without mother." This is true of Adam, but of none of his posterity. Noah, Shem, and every other man whom Melchisedec has been supposed to be, had a father and mother. This leads us to conclude, that Melchisedec, who had no father nor mother, was more than man. But here it may be said, that, by having neither father nor mother, nothing more is meant than that his genealogy was lost or not recorded. Of this there is no proof or probability. If he was a man of superior dignity and excellence to Abraham, it is hard to believe that his genealogy should have been either lost or not recorded. The apostle, however, plainly contradicts this absurd supposition, by subjoining, "Without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." It was very improper to say, that he had neither descent, nor beginning of days, nor end of life, merely because his descent, his birth, and death were not recorded in sacred or profane history. These expressions naturally and almost necessarily convey the idea, that he never had a beginning and end of life, like any mere man. And this is further confirmed by his being set up in contrast with other mere *mortal* men. "And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed, that he liveth" and "abideth a priest continually." Whoever Melchisedec was, it is certain, according to this description of him, that he never died, and is now alive. But such a person must be more than man; for it is appointed to all men once to die. The apostle, moreover, represents Melchisedec as superior to mere men in *dignity* as well as immortality. "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have

a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they came out of the loins of Abraham: but *he*, whose descent is not counted from them, (that is, Melchisedec, who is not of *human descent*) received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better." Why does the apostle take so much pains to prove that Melchisedec was greater than Abraham the patriarch, the man who had the promises, that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed? The reason is plain; for by proving Melchisedec to be *greater* than Abraham, he proves him to be more than man, which is the grand point he means to establish. I know that a writer, not long ago, observed that we ought to consider Abraham in that *low estate* in which he was when Melchisedec met him; and then his being superior to Abraham will be no argument to prove his being more than man. But the apostle says he was superior to Abraham *when* he had the promises, and was really superior to any man then on the face of the earth. The dignity and immortality which the apostle expressly ascribes to Melchisedec, therefore, clearly prove him to be superior to Abraham in his best estate, and to every other man in the world. This leads me to observe once more,

3. That we have clear, positive, scriptural evidence, that Melchisedec was Christ himself. The apostle having curiously mentioned Melchisedec in the fifth and sixth chapters of this epistle, undertakes in this seventh chapter to prove that he is Christ, and spends twenty-one verses on the subject. Every lineament which he has drawn of the character of Melchisedec agrees with the known character of Christ. Is Melchisedec called *priest* of the most high God? so is Christ. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." Is Melchisedec called the *king of Salem* or Jerusalem? so is Christ. God the Father says, "I have set *my King* upon my holy hill of Zion," that is, Jerusalem. Is Melchisedec called *King of peace?* so is Christ. For of him it is foretold, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, *The Prince of Peace.*" Is Melchisedec represented as being without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life? This character perfectly agrees with the character of Christ, to whom God the Father says, Heb. i. 8, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the

foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish; but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment: and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." And in the thirteenth chapter of this same epistle the apostle says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." Is Melchisedec said to be superior to Abraham? so is Christ. For he says himself, "Before Abraham was, I am." Is Melchisedec said not to proceed from the tribe of Levi? so is Christ. "For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident, that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." Is Melchisedec said "to abide a priest continually?" so is Christ. "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he *ever liveth* to make intercession for them." But it may be asked, why did not the apostle say in plain words that Melchisedec was Christ, if he meant so? I answer, he did say so in plain words. For he begins to describe the character of Melchisedec in the first verse of this chapter, and continues the description, without change of person, down to the twelfth verse, and then says, "He of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident, that our Lord sprang out of Juda." This is expressly saying, that *he* of whom he had been speaking, namely, Melchisedec, was our Lord, who sprang out of Judah. Thus it appears, that Melchisedec, priest of the most high God, without beginning of days, and end of life, is the very same person as Jesus Christ, who once appeared in the form of God, and afterwards in the form of God and man, and who is now the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. We have shown that he was more than man, and possessed all the peculiar properties of him, who is "God and man in two distinct natures, and one person forever." I proceed to show,

II. That Christ, who is king of Zion, and Prince of Peace, *abideth a priest continually*. The apostle speaks much of the perpetuity of Christ's priesthood in this epistle. He quotes in the fifth chapter, that prophecy respecting Christ in the one hundred and tenth psalm. "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art a priest *forever* after the order of Melchisedec." In the sixth chapter he says again, "Jesus is made an high-priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." In the text he says, "He is made like unto the Son of God, and abideth a priest continually." And from the sixteenth verse to

the end of the chapter, he insists largely upon the perpetuity of Christ's priesthood. Among other things concerning Christ he says, "Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest *forever* after the order of Melchisedec. And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest; (for those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath, by him that said unto him, The Lord sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.) And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood;" and "is consecrated *for evermore*." It is very plain from these and other texts which might be cited, that Christ abideth a priest continually, or that he always will be a priest in the same sense in which he ever was a priest. We know he has been a priest by becoming incarnate, by atoning for sin, and by interceding for the elect. And in all these respects, he abides and will abide a priest continually. For,

1. He will continue to be incarnate. The union between his divine and human nature will never be dissolved. This union continued after his resurrection. He appeared to have the same body; he said he had the same body; and Thomas examined it, and found it to be so. He ascended to heaven with the same body; and since his ascension, the apostle John, in vision, saw him in the form of man; and he told John, what he told his disciples when he went up into heaven, that he should appear visibly in the form of man, at the great and last day. That union of the divine and human nature of Christ, which commenced at his birth, will continue forever. Christ, the second Person in the sacred Trinity, will continue to be united with a human soul and body to all eternity. And in this respect, he will be a priest forever, after the order of Melchisedec, who was the second Person in the Godhead apparently united with a human soul and body. After this order and appearance, Christ will really be forever such a priest of the most high God. You recollect that the argument, which the apostle uses, to prove the perpetuity of Christ's priesthood, is taken from his being made a priest *after the order* of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron. The Aaronical priests died; and death which destroyed their bodies destroyed their priesthood; but the death of Christ did not destroy his body, nor consequently his priesthood. Being made like unto the Son of God and like unto the son of man; that is, being

really God and man in two natures, he will continue forever, and forever perform the part of a priest. For,

2. His atoning virtue will forever remain in its full force. It is the part of a priest to make atonement, and Christ acted in his priestly office when he gave his life a ransom for many. This the apostle observes in the chapter following the text. "Every high-priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity that this man, (the man Christ Jesus) have somewhat also to offer." And though his offering himself a sacrifice for sin was a *transient* act; yet the atonement he made by it, will forever remain in its full value and efficacy. This the apostle, in treating on the priesthood of Christ, clearly and fully illustrates. He says, "Every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering *oftentimes* the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, (meaning Christ) after he had offered *one* sacrifice for sins, forever sat down on the right hand of God. For by *one* offering he hath perfected *forever* them that are sanctified." And again he says, "Christ being come an high-priest of good things to come; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in *once* into the holy place, having obtained *eternal* redemption for us." Christ will forever continue to atone for the sins of men, by that *one* offering of himself to God, in their room and stead; and consequently his redemption is an eternal redemption, and his priesthood an eternal priesthood. Besides,

3. Christ will *forever* continue to *intercede* as well as to *atone*. It was the part of the Jewish priests to intercede, as well as to make atonement for the people. And the apostle represents Christ as perpetually performing the priestly office, by making continual intercession for those whom he has redeemed by his blood. He says, "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." And again he says, "This man, (meaning Christ) because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make *intercession* for them." Christ's perpetual intercession conclusively proves his perpetual priesthood.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If Melchisedec was Christ, as has been, perhaps, sufficiently proved, then the Old Testament and New are insepa-

rably connected. The character of Christ *in his priestly office* is exhibited through all the Old Testament. In this character he was exhibited from Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses to his death on the cross. Adam, Abel, and all the patriarchs offered sacrifices, which prefigured him as the Lamb of God, slain in promise and prediction from the foundation of the world. The pious patriarchs knew that their piacular sacrifices had no virtue, in themselves considered, to atone for sin, and that all their efficacy consisted in typifying Christ in his priestly office, as a suffering Saviour. By an eye of faith, they looked through their bloody sacrifices to the blood of Christ, and relied on that alone for pardon and salvation. These, the apostle assures us, "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and *embraced* them." Abraham, we are told, *saw* Christ's day. The sacrifices, and the priests that offered them, were typical of Christ in his priestly office. So David believed. "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." The pious Jews understood the typical meaning of the Old Testament sacrifices. For when Christ first made his appearance as Mediator, John beheld him and cried, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." The apostles constantly exhibited Christ in his priestly office, and as making atonement for sin by the sacrifice of himself. And Paul wrote his whole epistle to the Hebrews, to explain the nature and design of the Old Testament sacrifices, and to prove that they were all types of Christ in his priestly office. Hear his explanation of these sacrifices, which is similar to and connected with his whole train of reasoning through the epistle. "But Christ being come an high-priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in *once* into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us: for if the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Thus the character of Christ in his priestly office runs through the whole Old and New Testaments, and perfectly unites and connects them together, for nearly two thousand years. The prophets and the apostles lived at a great distance of time from one another, and could not combine together to propagate a forgery among mankind,

respecting the priestly office of Christ. Their united and consistent representations of Christ as a priest after the order of Melchisedec, is a moral demonstration of the inspiration and truth of both the Old and New Testaments. Those who believe the inspiration of the Old Testament, cannot consistently deny the inspiration of the New; and those who believe the inspiration of the New, cannot consistently deny the inspiration of the Old. Indeed, it is impossible to account for the peculiar harmony and connection between the Old Testament and New, on any rational supposition, but that of their both being written by divine inspiration.

2. It appears from what has been said, that to deny that Christ in his priestly office made atonement for sin by his sufferings and death on the cross, is virtually to deny the gospel and the whole Bible. His character as an atoning Priest is exhibited from Genesis to the Revelations. The doctrine of Christ's atonement is to be found not merely in a few detached, unconnected, insulated passages of scripture, but to be found through the whole, from beginning to end. It seems very strange, that any men, but especially that any professed preachers of the gospel, should deny the priestly character of Christ, and the atonement he made by his sufferings and death, in that office. But all Socinians do *expressly*, and all who deny the Divinity of Christ, do *implicitly* deny the doctrine of atonement. The Socinians hold, that Christ was a mere man, and died not to make the least atonement for sin, but to set an example of obedience, and confirm the precepts he taught. Though the Arians deny the real Divinity of Christ, yet they suppose he was more than man, or a superior angelic being, and died to make atonement for sin: but it is difficult to see how he would make a sufficient atonement for sin, if his finite nature were not united to a divine nature, as they suppose it was not. All Unitarians, therefore, either expressly or implicitly deny the atonement of Christ. But take away the doctrine of the atonement from the gospel, and it appears to contain no better system of religion than Deism; and can afford no better ground of hope of salvation to sinners, than Deism or Paganism.

3. It appears from Christ's abiding continually in his priestly office, that all true believers will finally persevere in holiness, and receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. The doctrine of the final perseverance of saints is an essential doctrine of the gospel, and a peculiar doctrine of Calvinism. Arminians and Methodists, and all who deny Calvinism, deny that real saints shall certainly persevere; and maintain that they may finally fall away and perish. But

Christ said to his true disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also." It is true, indeed, believers are weak, dependent, and morally imperfect creatures. They live in an evil world; surrounded by innumerable dangers from without and from within; they are liable to deviate from the path of duty; and exposed to violate their good resolutions and solemn engagements, to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But Christ, who has laid down his life for them, abideth a priest continually, to intercede for them with the Father, who always hears his intercessions for his people. The apostle, in this epistle, clearly shows, that Christ's intercession for believers is the firm and immutable ground of their security. "But this man, because he *continueth ever*, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make *intercession* for them." "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high-priest over the house of God: let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: for he is faithful that promised." "For men verily sware by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we* might have *a strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high-priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." We can hardly suppose, that the apostle would have taken so much pains to prove the perpetuity of Christ's priestly office, if he had not viewed it as a subject of great importance to Christians in this present trying and dangerous state. And it is certainly of great importance, if the perseverance of saints depends upon the perpetual intercession of Christ for them, and his intercession is a permanent source of their comfort and consolation through life. Those who deny the perpetuity of Christ's priestly office, and the precious doctrine of the saints perseverance, which is founded upon it, can have no solid ground to hope for eternal life; but must live in the dark and painful

state of uncertainty whether they shall receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.

4. Does Christ abide a priest continually? Is he still God and man, mediator, and intercessor? Then he is as gracious and merciful as ever he was, and as ready to hear the prayers, relieve the distresses, and supply the wants of his friends, as when he tabernacled in the flesh and dwelt on the earth. We know he then went about doing good, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and comforting the afflicted. He mourned with them that mourned, and wept with them that wept. His heart was full of benevolence and compassion towards all poor, miserable objects that applied to him for relief. He heard their cries, commiserated their condition, and supplied their wants. And though he has withdrawn his bodily presence from this world, yet he has not withdrawn his attention, his care, or his benevolence from mankind. His eyes and his heart are constantly fixed upon them; and he is always ready to bestow every favor upon every individual, which is consistent with his perfect wisdom and benevolence to bestow. He invites all to ask, that they may receive, and to seek, that they may find. While he is sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high, he continues a prince, a saviour, and intercessor. This affords great and constant encouragement to look to him for all the blessings we need under all the circumstances of life. Accordingly, the apostle invites believers to go humbly and confidently to Christ, with all their spiritual wants and burdens; because he is full of tenderness and compassion in his priestly office. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high-priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come *boldly* unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." If Christians are in spiritual darkness, they may go to Christ to remove their darkness. If they are in a state of spiritual stupidity and worldly-mindedness, they may go to Christ to awaken their attention, and prevent their souls from cleaving to the dust. If they have become careless and negligent in their religious exercises, they may go to Christ to give them spiritual animation and quickening. If they have wandered from God and the path of duty, they may go to Christ to heal their backslidings, and give them grace in time of need. If

they are in any trouble, sorrow, or affliction, they may go to Christ for comfort, support, and consolation. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, while he lived upon earth; and knows by experience how to sympathize with the sons and daughters of sorrow and affliction. If Christians would humbly and confidently go to Christ with all their trials, burdens, and afflictions, they might obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need. This is their great privilege and duty, and if they neglect it, they may expect to feel the bitter consequences of it.

5. Did Christ, in his priestly office, pour out his soul unto death on the cross for the salvation of sinners? Then it is difficult to conceive how any of his real friends can live contentedly in the neglect of commemorating his death at his table. He has commiserated and commemorated them. He has chosen them to salvation from before the foundation of the world. He has interceded for them with the Father, to send his Spirit to awaken them from their native stupidity, to fasten convictions of their sin and guilt upon their consciences, and to turn them from sin to holiness, and raise them from spiritual death to spiritual life. And after all this, he has prayed for them, that their faith may not fail, nor they finally fall away and perish. He has exercised the same special grace and pardoning mercy towards them, that he has exercised towards those who have named his name, and commemorated his death, at his table. But yet they have neglected to give unto him the glory due to his name, and to obey his dying command. Now, what excuse can they make for their neglect? We know one excuse which they often make. They plead, that they do not see their way clear to profess Christ before men, and commemorate his death, for they have doubts whether they have ever experienced a saving change, and they are waiting for more light and evidence of their gracious state. But the persons we are now speaking of are supposed to be real friends to Christ and his cause. And on this supposition, they have the witness in themselves that they have been born of God. This evidence they *might* see, and *ought* to see, and have no excuse for not seeing. They have the same *kind* of infallible evidence of being the subjects of saving grace that other Christians have, and must be as capable of seeing it. But they are waiting for other evidence, or brighter evidence, which they have no right to expect. Grace is the only infallible evidence of grace, and this evidence they have, though they have not so much of it as some others may have. But have they ground to expect to have more grace and brighter evidence of it, so long as they

neglect a plain and important duty, which they are bound by the strong and endearing obligation of gratitude to perform? Let them ask their own hearts to answer this question. Did they not have better evidence of a saving change soon after they hoped they experienced it, than they have generally had since? Has not their evidence diminished, rather than increased; and the irresolution to make a public profession become weaker and weaker? And are they not still seeking after better and better excuses for their past neglect? I am speaking of none but real friends of Christ, and who have real evidence of it, but refuse to be enlightened, and comforted, and persuaded to do their duty. There are undoubtedly such persons in the world, and it is believed there are such persons in this place, and even in this assembly. Their neglect is injurious to themselves, injurious to this diminishing church, and injurious to Christ, who has merited their gratitude and obedience, by distinguishing marks of his pity, compassion, and special grace. There may be others, who had hopes of a saving change, but have lost them, because they were not well founded. But if they have lost their ground of hope, they have lost their ground of fear. Their state is extremely dangerous, and far more dangerous for having had and having lost their religious impressions. How must such persons feel on a sacramental Sabbath! They once hoped, and perhaps intended to come to the table of Christ, but now have but very little ground to expect that they ever shall come to the communion of saints in this world, or in the world to come. Can they bear the thought of an eternal separation from those whom they cannot but inwardly venerate and esteem? a pious father, or a pious mother, or a pious brother, or a pious sister, or a pious friend.

This subject now applies to another class of hearers: I mean such as have never made a profession of religion, and who have no present desire nor intention of making a profession. Though Christ has died for them, and though he has invited them to come to him for life, and though he has waited to be gracious to them; yet they have despised and rejected his invitations, and gone their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise, and determined to postpone the care of their souls to an uncertain futurity. Can they justify themselves in thus neglecting their duty and their salvation? They *must* die as well as others, and they *may* die *as soon* as others. When they leave the world, they must *lose* the world; and when they have lost the world, what source of happiness can they expect to find in eternity? They are not united with Christians here,

and how can they be united with them hereafter? They are not united with one another here, for they are hateful and hating one another here; and how can they be united together hereafter? They do not love Christ here, and how can they love him hereafter? They do not love God here, and how can they love him hereafter? They are enemies to all beings but to themselves, and therefore all beings must be enemies to them. And when they find themselves entirely friendless, they will find themselves completely poor, and wretched, and miserable. This, you will say, is a dreadful description of our situation. But is it an imaginary description? Is it not a scriptural description? And can you paint to yourselves a better description of your future and eternal state, if you continue to neglect the great salvation offered to you in the gospel? There is but one alternative before you—to choose life, or to choose death; to enjoy life, or to suffer death. Christ has drawn a line of separation between you and his friends, by admitting them to his table; and you have drawn a line of distinction between them and yourselves, by neglecting and refusing to unite with them in celebrating his death. Christ invites you, and they invite you to unite with them; and when you do this, and not before, will Christ receive you graciously, and love you freely.

SERMON XIII.

THE CONSTANT ATTENDANCE OF CHRIST UPON DIVINE ORDINANCES.

"THEN sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?"—John, xi. 56.

WHEN Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, "then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and Pharisees a council and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.—Then from that day forth, they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him." As those men in the temple, who sought for Jesus, came on purpose to take him, that he might be put to death; so they and the council who sent them, had high expectations that he would be at the passover; and, though they did not find him at first, they had very little or no doubt that he would come to that sacred ordinance. This is plainly implied in the question they put to one another, "*What*

think ye, that he will not come to the feast?" They undoubtedly answered each other, He will come. They founded their expectation of his coming, upon their knowing that he had always been punctual, and never failed of attending the passover. This is the common mode of reasoning or conjecturing in such cases. If three men agree to meet together at a certain time and at a certain place; and two of them meet at the time and place, but the other is not present, they naturally ask, what think you? will he not come? Yes, he will come; for I have long known his punctuality in fulfilling his promises and appointments. Christ had for years punctually attended the passover, and never failed; which was well known to the council, and to those who came to the temple to find and take him. Though Christ went to the city of Ephraim, and continued there with his disciples, which was at a distance from Jerusalem, yet he had such a great regard for public worship and divine institutions, that he would travel any distance, and surmount any difficulties, that any Jew would, in obedience to his Father's command, to attend an ordinance of divine appointment. Though it is not said in the text that he did attend the passover referred to, yet we may justly conclude that he did attend it; for there is reason to believe that it was the passover immediately preceding his crucifixion; and we know that he did attend that passover. The text, in this connection, naturally suggests this general observation,

That Christ was a constant attendant on public worship and divine ordinances. I shall show,

I. That Christ was a constant attendant on public worship and divine ordinances; and,

II. Why he was so.

I. I am to show that Christ was a constant attendant on public worship and divine ordinances.

His pious parents brought him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They constantly attended all religious duties, whether private or public. They solemnly and publicly devoted him to God at eight days old in the temple. "And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem *every year* at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem." It appears from this sketch of the life of Christ, that

he was brought up to attend public worship and divine ordinances; from which it is natural to conclude, that he was a constant attendant upon these religious duties. Though he often preached in the open fields on common days, yet he always went into the synagogues to preach on the Sabbath, because he meant punctually to observe and maintain the public worship of God on the day he had appointed, and to teach the people to do the same. "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not after their works: for they say, and do not." Christ always attended the public worship on the Sabbath; and either preached, or heard the Jewish priest expound the law. We are told, when he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, that, "as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of Esaias the prophet." And when he had opened it, and read a chapter, he closed it, and gave it again to the minister; that is, to the Jewish priest, who usually officiated there. Thus it appears that it was the custom of Christ, or his constant practice, to attend public worship on the Sabbath.

Nor was he less punctual in attending other divine ordinances. He attended the passover when he was twelve years old; and from that time to his entrance into the ministry, there can be no doubt of his constantly attending that sacred ordinance, though the evangelists say nothing about that, and but a very little about anything else in his life, until he appeared as a preacher. After that, we read of his repeatedly and constantly going to Jerusalem to keep the passover. And it was his constancy and punctuality in this practice that made his enemies so confidently expect that he would come to the feast, before he came.

I now proceed to show,

II. Why Christ so constantly and punctually attended public worship and divine ordinances.

Christ was a man, a descendant of Abraham, and by birth a Jew, and bound to obey all the laws given by Moses. "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." He was bound to observe all the ceremonial and moral laws given to the people of God under the Mosaic dispensation. Accordingly, he paid tribute to Cæsar, and observed the Sabbaths, feasts and fasts required by the law, and punctually fulfilled all righteousness. The question now is, why did he so constantly and punctiliously

attend the instituted duties of religion? Here several good reasons may be mentioned. And,

1. It was because he loved to obey his Father. He says, "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." He says, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." Again he says, "I do always those things that please him." Christ knew that nothing could be more pleasing to his Father, than his constantly attending the public worship and sacred ordinances which he had appointed. All divinely instituted duties are founded on divine authority; and therefore more direct respect is paid to God, by obedience to these, than by obedience to moral duties. Christ paid more direct respect to God by attending his public worship, and keeping the passover, than by healing the sick, or feeding the multitudes, or paying tribute to Cæsar. The duties of justice and mercy are all moral duties, and are in their own nature binding, aside from the authority or command of God. But the instituted duties of religion derive all their authority from the commands of God. If he had not commanded them, they would not have been duties, nor laid men under the least obligation to perform them. But since they are the positive commands of God, and clothed with his infinite authority, those who cordially obey them, pay a cordial, direct and supreme respect to him. It was supreme love to his Father that prompted Christ to observe the Sabbath, to attend public worship in his house, and keep the feasts he had appointed. His love to his Father's authority and sacred institutions, filled him with a holy zeal and indignation, to see his Father's house profaned. "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money, sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple—and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." He knew that all the laws of his Father's house, and all his religious institutions were clothed with divine authority, and, of course, that all profanation of them was pointed directly against him, and poured contempt upon his infinite authority, which he could not patiently bear. His zeal on this occasion was a beautiful and striking expression of his sacred and supreme regard for the worship and ordinances of God. He came to the passover with love to that sacred feast, which kindled into zeal against those who polluted and made the table of the Lord contempti-

ble. By this he gave clear and convincing evidence that he attended public worship and divine ordinances, in cordial obedience to his Father's will.

2. Christ constantly attended the worship and ordinances of God, because he loved all religious duties, whether secret, social, or public. How many instances are mentioned of his leaving his disciples and the multitudes, and retiring for the purpose of secret devotion. He spent a whole night in praying to his Father in secret, just before he chose his twelve apostles. He humbly and submissively prayed to his Father, that if it were possible, he would save him from the tremendous sufferings in the garden and on the cross. And he most devoutly and pathetically prayed for his disciples and all his followers, at the celebration of the last passover and first sacrament. He preached the gospel for about four years constantly, Sabbath after Sabbath, and day after day; and spent almost the whole of that time in the performance of some of the instituted duties of religion; which affords the highest testimony of his love to public worship, divine ordinances, and all religious duties. It is not strange, therefore, that he constantly observed the Sabbath, constantly attended public worship, and punctiliously celebrated the passover. The men of the world are constant in pursuing the objects of their pleasure and delight. Good men are constant in the discharge of the public and private duties of devotion; which give them peculiar pleasure and satisfaction. David says, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." At another time, he cries in ecstasy, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Christ loved God far more ardently than David did, and enjoyed far greater delight and satisfaction than David did, in the secret, private and public exercises of religious worship. And this inspired him with a zeal to travel from place to place in heat and cold, to perform the duties of the Sabbath, and all other instituted duties. Whether he was in Galilee, or any part of Judea, he would surmount all difficulties or dangers in the way, to attend the annual passover, or any other religious feast of divine appointment. His love to religious duties never failed to produce a constancy and punctuality in attending public worship and divine ordinances.

3. Christ loved to hold communion with his Father and his friends; and therefore he was constant in meeting them, when

gathered together for the purpose of union and communion in religious services. He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Again he said, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." He anticipated the peculiar happiness he should enjoy in the union and communion with his Father and his friends at the last passover and first sacrament. "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water: follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the good man of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready. And they went, and found as he said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." He first administered the passover, for the last time; and then administered the sacramental symbols of his body and blood; which was the first institution of a standing memorial of his death. At this communion-table we see why Christ had always been so constant and punctual in attending the public worship of God, and especially the celebration of the passover, at the very day and hour appointed. It was because with desire he desired to hold communion with his people in divine ordinances. He looked forward to the Sabbath to see the Lord's day; and he looked forward to the passover to see that day of communion with his beloved disciples and friends, with strong and ardent desires for spiritual and divine enjoyments. Christ enjoyed much greater pleasure and satisfaction in communion with his disciples and sincere Israelites, than they ever enjoyed in communion with him. We have no account that he ever neglected the public duties of the Sabbath, or the celebration of the passover; and the reason was, that he sincerely desired to attend every divine or-

dinance, for the sake of enjoying union and communion with his Father and his friends. Besides,

4. He constantly observed the Sabbath and all divine ordinances, because he knew that they were absolutely necessary, in order to maintain and promote the cause of true religion in the world. He said, he came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them, by promoting the great and important design which they were intended to promote; that is, the spread and perpetuity of true religion and vital piety. Though, as Lord of the Sabbath, he changed the day; yet he did not annul the duty and obligation of keeping it as holy time, and consecrated to the special service of God. Though he abolished the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation, yet he did not set aside all divine institutions; but actually instituted Baptism and the Sacrament, as perpetual ordinances, in the room of Circumcision and the Passover. He knew that there must be perpetual divine ordinances, and that these must be practically observed, in order to preserve and keep religion alive in the world. And for this reason, he not only instituted Baptism and the sacred Supper, but by his supreme authority, commanded all men to attend them according to their appointment. Accordingly, he strictly and constantly attended the divine institutions under the Mosaic dispensation, so long as they continued in their full force and obligation, to show all his followers and the world at large, the vast importance of maintaining and perpetuating his own sacred ordinances and institutions. He knew that his cause and interest could not be promoted, unless his Sabbath and his other sacred ordinances should be maintained and perpetuated. He had a deep sense of the infinite importance of that cause, for which he was about to suffer and die; and he knew, that his new spiritual kingdom, which he designed should extend through the world, and continue to the end of time, could not be maintained, extended and continued, unless its fundamental laws and ordinances should be kept and perpetuated. As he paid tribute to Cæsar, to show the world the importance of maintaining civil government for the good of civil society; so he constantly and punctually attended the passover and all other divine ordinances, to show the world the importance of maintaining the Sabbath and all other divine institutions, for the sake of preserving and promoting true religion and vital piety, from generation to generation as long as the world stands.

This subject now applies to those in particular, who are about to celebrate the memorials of Christ's death. He appointed this sacred ordinance for the agreeable purpose of holding mutual

communion with his Father, and his own sincere followers. With desire he has desired to meet you at his table. Though he is now absent in body, yet he is present in spirit, and will fulfill his promise, which he made to his friends for their consolation: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He now practically says, as he verbally said on the last great day of the feast; "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Yea, he says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." As he has exercised astonishing benevolence towards you in his death, and now exercises peculiar complacency towards you at his table; so it becomes you to exercise supreme complacency towards him, and the sincerest and warmest gratitude for the rich and distinguishing blessings which he has already bestowed on you, and the still richer blessings he has prepared for you in his kingdom above. As he is united to you as the head is united to the members, so it becomes you to be united to him as the branches are united to the vine. Such a mutual union lays a permanent foundation for mutual and permanent communion, which will afford you the purest and highest felicity both in time and eternity. Open wide the door of your hearts, that the King of glory may come in.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. In view of this subject, it appears that a constant attendance on public worship and divine ordinances, is a good mark of vital piety and Christian sincerity in professors of religion. It indicates submission to divine authority. It indicates love to every species of religious worship. It indicates a delight in communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all true believers. And it no less indicates a sincere and ardent desire to perpetuate and promote the cause of true religion and vital piety to the end of time. In a word, it indicates that they have the spirit of Christ, and are his cordial friends and servants. A constant and punctual attendance on divine institutions certainly indicates all these things. Look at such attendants. Do they not daily read the Bible? Do they not constantly practice social and secret prayer? Do they not bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Do they not remember the Sabbath-day, and keep it holy; abstaining from all secular concerns, and performing all

the public, private, and secret duties of the day? Do they not cordially approve and avow the doctrines according to godliness? Do they not use the world as not abusing it; and employ it as a means of promoting religion at home and abroad? Do they not exert their influence to suppress vice, error, irreligion, and everything which tends to dishonor God, and wound the cause of religion? It is granted there may be exceptions in this class of attendants; but still their general character and conduct bears testimony to the sincerity of their profession. The world often call in question the validity of profession; but they cannot, with any appearance of candor, call in question the validity of practice. It was by the constant and punctual practice of all religious duties, that the primitive Christians convinced their bitterest enemies that they had been with Jesus, that they possessed his spirit, and were his sincere friends and followers. The same constant and punctual practice of all religious, instituted duties, is one of the best evidences of the sincerity of a Christian profession. When the men of the world see professors of religion constantly attend public worship, and the sacrament of the Lord's supper, they naturally conclude that they love and practice all religious duties and moral virtues; and inwardly believe that they are real Christians, unless they see some positive evidence to the contrary.

2. The neglect and inconstancy of professors of religion, in attending public worship and divine ordinances, is an unfavorable mark of their want of vital piety and Christian sincerity. They certainly fail of exhibiting one peculiar mark of saving grace, which the constant attendants on divine ordinances exhibit in their favor. It is true, indeed, they are not to be measured merely by their fellow Christians. There is a higher and infallible standard, by which they ought to be tried. Christ himself has given an infallible rule, by which they may safely try their Christian sincerity. He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Also, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." And again he says, "Ye are my *friends*, if ye *do whatsoever I command you*." These declarations obviously imply, that those professors of religion who do not keep the commandments of Christ, by paying a universal obedience to them, are not his real friends. Christ expressly makes obedience to his commands the true evidence of sincerity, and want of obedience the true evidence of insincerity. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: and the rain

descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." Now, if those professors of religion who are inconstant in their attendance upon public worship and divine ordinances, will impartially try their external conduct by the infallible rule which Christ has given them, must they not fear that they have not the love of Christ in them, and have built their eternal hopes upon a false and sandy foundation, which will give way and sink them in perdition? They have visibly a dark mark upon them. Their spot is not the spot of God's children, but of a perverse and crooked generation that have corrupted themselves.

3. It appears from what has been said, that the inconstancy of professors of religion, in respect to attending the public worship of God, and the ordinances of the gospel, is greatly detrimental to the cause of Christ and vital piety. Their inconstancy in not coming to the house of God, and to the ordinances of the gospel, is as visibly and almost as publicly known as the conduct of constant attendants. It is as easy to discover an empty seat, as a seat that is filled. The world judge of religion by the influence it has upon the conduct of its professors. If it leads them to the house of God, to the table of Christ, and to the uniform practice of religious duties and moral virtues, they are constrained to believe that it is a divine and important reality, and the one thing needful to *them*, as well as to others. But when they see it does not produce these amiable and salutary effects upon professors themselves, they are apt to think, if not to say, such professed Christians are no better than non-professors, but much more insincere and inconsistent. Nor do they stop here; but call in question the sincerity of all professors. And just so far as they can make themselves believe that professors are not sincere, they despise not only the profession of religion, but religion itself; and disregard the gospel, and all gospel duties and ordinances. Some, when they see the inconstancy of professors in attending public worship, justify themselves in entirely forsaking the house of God. Some, when they see professors neglect family worship, justify themselves in neglecting that duty. Some, when they see professors neglect reading the Bible, justify themselves in disbelieving and rejecting it. Besides, the inconstancy of some professors tends to lead those who have been constant in at-

tending divine worship and ordinances, to become inconstant. This is not a very uncommon effect of the inconstancy of some upon the conduct of others. The inconstancy of some non-professors, who are men of reputation and distinction, has a powerful tendency to lead other non-professors to neglect keeping the Sabbath, and attending public worship. Inconstancy in attending divine worship and ordinances in the members of a church, has the same corrupting influence upon the body of the church. In all the respects which have been mentioned, the inconstancy of church members, in respect to attending public worship, and divine ordinances, is highly injurious to the cause of Christ and vital piety. Professors of religion are capable of doing far greater injury to the cause they profess to promote, than non-professors can do. Indifference, negligence, or opposition, discovers only their native depravity, and necessity of regeneration, or change of heart, which is the essence of vital piety. But the conduct of insincere and inconstant professors tends to destroy vital piety at the root. It serves to flatter sinners, that they are as safe as others, while they totally neglect religion, and all concern about the salvation of their souls.

4. Professors of religion set a bad example, when they are not punctual in attending public worship at the proper time. Christ set an excellent example of punctuality in attending divine ordinances. When he proposed to celebrate the passover with his disciples, he made previous preparation for it, and took care to be present at the place and at the time appointed. He loved that sacred ordinance, and had a strong desire to meet his disciples punctually. "When the *hour* was come, he sat down and the twelve apostles with him." He had probably taught them before, but, if not, he then taught them to be punctual in attending public worship, and all social meetings and mutual appointments. And it seems that his apostles remembered this useful lesson of instruction. For when Christ afterwards appointed a time and place to meet them just before his ascension to heaven, they met at the very time and place. This the inspired Evangelist has recorded. "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them." Punctuality is not only a moral, but religious virtue, especially in respect to the attendance on public worship. It is of the nature of Christian veracity; and the want of it is of the nature of the want of Christian veracity. It is to be required and expected of Christian professors, that they be punctual in fulfilling all their engagements. The want of punctuality in attending public worship seems to indicate a

want of love to that duty, which Christ felt and expressed, by his punctual attendance. Nor is this all. It seems to indicate a want of due regard to the feelings and expectations of others; it proves an interruption to those who are devoutly engaged in social worship, and is a bad example to non-professors. It is as easy to be punctually early, as punctually late in coming to the house and worship of God. If Christians would resolve the day before the Sabbath to attend public worship, and make previous and suitable preparations for it, they would seldom find any great obstructions or hindrances to the fulfilling of their fixed resolutions on Sabbath morning. It must, therefore, be owing to some blamable cause, if Christians, or others, are not seasonably present at the house of God at the proper, appointed time on the Sabbath, especially where they have a solemn monitor of the exact time of coming together. The want of religious punctuality is not a mere venial fault, but is something offensive to God as well as man.

5. It appears from what has been said, that the total neglect of public worship naturally tends to the total neglect of all religious duties. Those who neglect to meet God at the time and place he has appointed, can very easily persuade themselves, that they may neglect to obey any commands he has given them. And if they are indisposed to perform the duty of public worship, there can be no doubt whether they are not as much indisposed to perform any other religious duty. What think ye; will men who totally neglect public worship, remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy? Will they read the Bible on that day? Will they call upon God in private, or secret? Will they refrain from worldly thoughts, or secular concerns? Will they refrain from visiting or spending the day in their own service? Will they refrain from any evil practices which they pursue on other days? Will not the total neglect of public worship lead to profaneness, intemperance, gaming, theft, robbery and murder? How many poor, guilty, miserable creatures have confessed that the neglect of public worship, and the profanation of the Sabbath, brought them to die by the hand of public justice! Though it may appear to the young and thoughtless a small evil to forsake the house and worship of God, and profane his holy day; yet it has been found, by awful experience, that these are the sins which open the floodgates of iniquity, and plunge men in the most fatal, natural and moral evils. Alas! how many are there in this gospel land, that are pursuing these dreadful courses, which lead to temporal and eternal ruin! Where can you find a religious society, in which some such wretched creatures are not to be

found? And is not the number everywhere rapidly increasing?

6. Does it not appear from what has been said, that the cause of Christ and vital piety is declining in this place, which, in years past, has been noted for the constant and punctual attendance of the people on public worship and divine ordinances? The Sabbath, the public worship of God, and the holy sacraments, are the only religious institutions under the gospel, and were designed to be the great bulwarks of Christianity and vital piety. And they always answer this great and important purpose in a less or greater degree. Where is there more religion to be found, than in those places in which these gospel ordinances are constantly and punctually observed? Where is there so much religion to be found, as in such places? And where the Sabbath, the public worship of God, and the gospel ordinances are not constantly and punctually attended, does not religion languish and decay, and become nearly extinct? What then is the appearance and prospect of religion in this place? Do the people in general, whether young or old, as constantly and punctually attend public worship as they once did? Or do the professors of religion as constantly and punctually attend public worship and divine ordinances as they did ten or fifteen years ago? Are there not some out of the church, who never attend public worship from year to year? Are there not many more who seldom attend, and when they do, attend only part of the day? And is the case very different among professors of religion? Are there not some who are neither sick nor superannuated, who are rarely seen in the house of God on the Sabbath, and then only on sacrament days, and, perhaps, not always then? Does not such neglect of public worship and divine ordinances prevail and increase in this place? And do not the dreaded evils of this neglect equally prevail and increase? Does not the profanation of the Sabbath, the neglect of family prayer, the neglect of parental instruction and restraint, and of all religious duties, prevail and increase? These are infallible tokens of declension in religion and vital piety. Now, let me ask a serious and interesting question, Who have been primarily and principally concerned in bringing on such a declension? It seems necessary to ask another question, in order to answer this. In whose hands has the cause of religion been lodged in this place? Has it not been lodged in the hands of the church? Must they not, therefore, conclude that they have been the primary faulty cause of declension in religion in this place? With the church, I mean to include the pastor. Has he been constant and

punctual in attending public worship and divine ordinances? or, if he has been constant, has he been faithful? Has he preached the pure doctrines of the gospel plainly and fully? Has he properly invited sinners to accept the offers of the gospel, and secure the salvation of their souls? Has he warned and admonished them against fatal errors, and all manner of sinful and destructive practices? Or has he conformed to the sinful customs and manners of the world, and set an example that his people could not innocently follow? If he has done this, he is undoubtedly chargeable with blame, in promoting and increasing religious declension among this once religious and exemplary people. He has reflected, and will reflect more upon this serious subject. In the next place, let the professors of religion seriously inquire whether they have not been, in a great measure, the primary and faulty cause of the unhappy declension of religion and vital piety here? Had those who first came to the house of God this morning asked the question, What think ye? Will not such and such a member of the church come to the feast to-day? What would one and another have said? Undoubtedly, they would have said, we think such and such ones will come, for they have always constantly and punctually attended; but whether such and such and such a one will come to the feast, we doubt, for we have known him to be very inconstant and dilatory in attending public worship and divine ordinances. Are there not some such inconstant attendants on public worship and divine ordinances in this church? Have they not been influential in bringing on the declension of religion here? Are there others who, though not so inconstant, are unpunctual in attending public worship? And is not their example of a detrimental tendency to the instituted ordinances of religion? Are not some constant and punctual attendants on divine ordinances, in some other ways doing injustice to the cause of Christ? In a word, what think ye; have not the professors of religion here been blamably inconstant and unpunctual in attending public worship, and, by their example, led the men of the world to think, and speak, and act reproachfully with respect to the Sabbath, and all the ordinances of the gospel? If this be true, where should reformation begin? Should it not begin in the church? You have this day practically renewed your obligations to the divine Redeemer. Hear what he says to a declining church. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die."

SERMON XIV.

GROSS IGNORANCE OF DIVINE TRUTH, INCOMPATIBLE WITH CREDIBLE EVIDENCE OF PIETY.

"BRETHREN, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."—Romans, x. 1, 2, 3.

THESE words naturally lead us to inquire, why the apostle Paul believed, that his Jewish brethren were entirely destitute of true religion.

The apostle here solemnly declares, that he believed his Jewish brethren were totally destitute of true religion, and exposed to future and eternal ruin. It is, therefore, a very serious and important inquiry, why he entertained such an unfavorable opinion of those, who were of the seed of Abraham, of the stock of Israel, and descendants of God's peculiar people. Here then, I would observe,

1. That he did not form this unfavorable opinion of his brethren according to the flesh, through any religious prejudice. Religious prejudice is of a blinding nature, and tends to lead those who are under its influence, to form an unjust and censorious opinion of the religious character of others. Nathanael was prejudiced against Christ, on account of the place of his birth and education. For when Philip told him, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph," Nathanael expressed his surprise and prejudice—"Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The Jews also were so prejudiced against the Samaritans, that they would have no dealings with them. But Paul had no such national prejudice against the Jews. He felt both a natural and benevolent affection towards them, which he expressed in the strongest terms. "Brethren,

my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." He not only wished and desired, but heartily prayed for their salvation. He really believed, that they were entirely destitute of grace, and were pursuing a devout path to destruction. He knew, that they had a very different opinion of themselves, and thought that they were eminently pious, and going in the direct road to heaven. But he saw something about them, which convinced him that they were under a strong delusion, which exposed them to final disappointment and ruin. This excited his tender compassion towards them, and his ardent, benevolent desire and prayer, that they might be undeceived and saved from the wrath to come. It was not owing, therefore, in the least degree, to any prejudice he had against them, that he plainly and faithfully told them, that they were in the state of nature, unrenewed, and without a title to eternal life; but it was solely owing to his sincere and compassionate desire for their spiritual and eternal good. Nor,

2. Did he believe that they were entirely destitute of grace, because they did not *profess* to have true religion. All the Jews were *professors* of religion, and some of them, especially the Scribes and Pharisees, were high professors, and verily thought they were eminently pious. They "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Paul says, that while he was a Pharisee, he thought he was perfectly holy or entirely blameless. And he tells one of that sect, that he not only professed, but boasted of his piety. "Behold," says he to him, "thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law, and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law." This was the high opinion which the Jews in general had of their piety, of which they publicly professed and boasted. Some persons appear so amiable, virtuous, and religious, that we should certainly believe they were truly *pious*, if they only had made a public profession of religion. It was not owing to the want of a public profession of religion, that the apostle did not believe his Jewish brethren had any true religion or vital piety. He did not complain of their not professing enough, but rather of their professing too much. Nor,

3. Was his disbelief of their piety owing to their neglect of the external duties of religion. They were extremely exact and punctilious in their external obedience to the law, and in

the duties of devotion. They paid tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin. They made long prayers, and fasted twice in the week. They shone like whited sepulchres in their external conduct, and outwardly appeared righteous unto men. They resembled the young man, who said he had kept the whole law from his youth up. Christ allowed, that they sustained such a beautiful external appearance, and the apostle does not deny it. But yet he did not believe, that they had the love of God in them, or possessed the least degree of true holiness. Besides,

4. It was not owing to their *want of zeal*, in performing the *duties* and promoting the *cause* of what they considered true religion, that he did not believe that they had any saving grace. Christ did not complain of them for having too little, but for having too much religious zeal. He said, "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves." Paul likewise acknowledges, that they were as zealous in religion as he ever was. He said to them, "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous towards God, as ye all are this day." And again he said, "Ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God and wasted it; and profited in the Jews' religion above many, my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." Hence he frankly acknowledges in the text, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God." But at the same time, in the most friendly and fraternal language, he told them that he did not believe they knew the grace of God in truth. It certainly appears strange at first view, that he should have such an unfavorable opinion of their piety, after he had owned them as his brethren according to the flesh, and expressed an ardent desire for their future and eternal good; after he had acknowledged their universal external obedience to the divine commands; and after he had allowed that they were very zealous in their religious duties and devotions. The serious and important question, which we proposed to consider, now arises: "Why did not the apostle view his Jewish brethren as *visible* saints?" He did not pretend to speak to them and judge of them, as a searcher of hearts, but only as a faithful minister, who had a right to form his religious opinion of them by visible evidence. But what visible evidence could

he have that they were not real saints, as they professed and believed themselves to be? He tells them the ground of his unfavorable opinion of them, in the text. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The sole reason which the apostle here assigns, why he had such an unfavorable opinion of his Jewish brethren, *is their gross ignorance of the great and essential doctrines of the gospel.* Such ignorance they manifested by disbelieving and rejecting the pure doctrines of the gospel which he preached. He knew that he had preached the first principles of the oracles of God; he knew that they had disbelieved and rejected those doctrines; he knew that their disbelief and rejection of them was owing to their gross ignorance; and he knew that such ignorance was entirely inconsistent with their having true love to God and faith in Christ, and of course, that they must be entirely destitute of saving grace. If you now ask, what were the great and essential truths of the gospel, of which they were so grossly ignorant? I answer,

1. That they were grossly ignorant of the true character of God. The apostle allows that they believed the existence of God, for they had a zeal of God; but he immediately subjoins, that their zeal was not according to knowledge, for they were ignorant of his righteousness, or moral character. God is love; and his moral character consists in pure, holy, impartial, universal, disinterested, righteous love. The righteousness of God means the same as his holiness, and his holiness comprises his goodness, justice, mercy, truth, and every moral excellence or perfection of his nature. But Paul's Jewish brethren had no true knowledge of these moral attributes of God. They thought he was altogether such a one as themselves; that he felt benevolently towards his friends, and malevolently towards his enemies. For this Christ condemned and reproved them. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Be

ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is *perfect*." They did not believe that "the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." They supposed, that his benevolent regard to their nation, excluded all his benevolent regard to all other nations. They had no idea of his disinterested and universal benevolence; and were therefore entirely ignorant of his inflexible justice, and sovereign mercy. When Christ preached in the congregation of Nazareth upon the doctrine of divine sovereignty in saving some and not others, "All they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill, (whereon their city was built,) that they might cast him down headlong." And when Paul taught the doctrine of Election and Reprobation, they complained and were ready to say, "Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" This was tantamount to saying, that the doctrine of Election and Reprobation destroyed man's free agency and accountability. The apostle had clear, personal knowledge, that his Jewish brethren were grossly ignorant of the moral character, the holy designs, and benevolent government of God, and therefore could have no right affections towards him.

2. They were no less ignorant of the *Law*, than of the character of God. The divine law is a transcript of the divine character. It expresses the very *heart* of God, or his holy, benevolent feelings towards all the moral subjects of his moral kingdom. Those, therefore, who are ignorant of God's moral character, must be equally ignorant of his moral law. The precept of the law expresses what God loves and approves; and the penalty of the law expresses what God hates and condemns. As God is possessed of pure, perfect, disinterested benevolence, so he must love and approve of pure, disinterested benevolence, and hate and condemn all selfishness. Accordingly, we find that the precept of his law requires pure, disinterested love to God and man, and forbids all partial, mercenary, selfish affections. But as the Jews were ignorant of the pure holiness, righteousness, and benevolence of God; so they were equally ignorant of the holiness, righteousness, and spirituality of both the precept and penalty of the divine law. Christ, in his sermon on the mount, reproved and condemned them for their gross ignorance of the divine law. He told them, that the divine law required them to love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves; and to do to others as they would that others should do to them. He told them, that the divine law primarily and supremely respected their hearts, and not merely

their external conduct, as they believed and maintained. He said to them, "Well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." The amiable young man, that said he had kept the whole law from his youth up, was totally ignorant of that pure, disinterested love, which the divine law required of him. And Paul, while he was a Pharisee, was equally ignorant of what the precept of the divine law required. For he was confident, that in respect to the righteousness of the law, "he was blameless," or had perfectly obeyed it. He did not discover his gross ignorance, until he understood the prohibition, "Thou shalt not covet;" or exercise selfishness. Then he was convinced, that he had been destitute of that disinterested love, which the law of God requires. He knew, therefore, by his own experience, that his Jewish brethren were entirely ignorant of the law, as well as of the moral character of God; which authorized him to tell them, that they were in a graceless and perishing condition.

3. The apostle's Jewish brethren were grossly ignorant of the depravity and criminality of their own hearts. This was the necessary consequence of their ignorance of God and of the divine law. They did not know that the divine law required pure *disinterested* love to God and man, and therefore did not know, that every selfish affection of their hearts and every selfish action of their lives, was a transgression of the divine law, and deserved eternal death. The Pharisee that went up to the temple to pray, felt no guilt, and feared no danger, and only thanked God for his discriminating goodness. None of that sect knew they were spiritually blind, and deaf, and dead in trespasses and sins, under a sentence of condemnation by the divine law, and exposed to endless ruin. Hence Christ said on a certain occasion, "For judgment I am come into this world; that they which see not might see, and that they which see, might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." Paul acknowledges, that while he was a Pharisee, he was entirely ignorant of the total depravity, selfishness and criminality of his own heart, and of his just desert of that eternal death which the holy law of God threatened to every transgressor of it. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law:

for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law, sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Paul here, by describing the ignorance of his own heart, while in the state of nature, has described the ignorance of his Jewish brethren, in respect to their depravity, guilt, and desert of eternal death. And therefore he knew, that such ignorance as he once had of his own heart, and such ignorance as his Jewish brethren had then, was totally inconsistent with their having any true love to God, or any true obedience to his law, or any true submission to his holy and absolute sovereignty. This knowledge of them gave him a right to believe that they were not visible saints, but visible sinners, and in a graceless and perishing condition.

4. Paul's Jewish brethren were grossly ignorant of the divinity and character of Christ as Mediator. He came to his own, but his own knew him not and received him not. Though the Jews were his peculiar people, to whom he had committed his sacred oracles, which contain numerous and plain predictions and descriptions of his incarnation, sufferings, and death; yet they viewed him as a mere man, and a very bad man. They charged him with breaking the Sabbath, with working miracles by the assistance of Satan, and with blasphemy by professing to be the Son of God, one with God, and equal to God. When Christ had cured the impotent man on the Sabbath, "the Jews sought to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father." When he had cast out a devil from one who was blind and dumb, the Pharisees said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." When Jesus said to the Jews, "Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am, then took they up stones to cast at him." And when Christ said, "I and my Father are one, then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for *blasphemy*, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." And for this crime their civil and ecclesiastical rulers con-

demned him to die. The apostle ascribes this instance of their conduct to their ignorance of his divinity and mediatorial character: "For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Hence,

5. They were grossly ignorant of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, through the atonement of Christ. As they were ignorant of Christ, as God-man, mediator, so they were necessarily ignorant of the atonement he made for the sins of the world, by his sufferings and death on the cross. Of course, they were entirely ignorant of the doctrine of pardon or justification, through his atoning blood. This ignorance of justification by faith alone, on the ground of Christ's atonement, they plainly manifested, by going about to establish their own righteousness, and refusing to submit unto the righteousness of God, displayed on the cross by Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. They desired and expected to be justified by the works of the law, and not by faith in Christ. They were as ignorant of the way of salvation through faith in Christ as mediator, as the heathen who never heard of Christ. The apostle knew that they could not be justified by faith without the deeds of the law, in their present state of ignorance, and of consequence, that they could not be justified at all, but were under a sentence of condemnation to eternal death. Their ignorance of God, of his law, of their own hearts, of the divinity and character of Christ, and of the terms of salvation, through faith in him, was a sufficient reason why the apostle should view them as totally destitute of saving grace.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from Paul's manner of judging in respect to the real character of his Jewish brethren, how we ought to judge of the real piety of all professors of religion. He judged whether they were in the state of nature, or in the state of grace, in the most candid and unprejudiced manner. He sincerely desired and prayed that they might be the subjects of saving grace. His sincere benevolence disposed him to judge in the most candid and favorable manner that their case could admit. He allowed they *professed to love* God; that they were constant and even punctilious in their external *obedience* to his commands; and that they were very zealous in their religious devotions, and in their exertions to promote what they considered the cause of religion. He observed and admitted

everything in their character and conduct, that had the appearance of true religion or vital piety. But putting all these favorable things in one scale, and their gross ignorance of the essential doctrines of the gospel in the other, he was constrained to believe that they were entirely destitute of vital piety or saving grace. The apostle was unbigoted, unprejudiced, uncensorious, and entirely candid, in forming this unfavorable opinion of his Jewish brethren. And this example of his, we all ought to follow in judging of the internal, vital piety of the professors of religion, in any and every denomination of Christians. We ought to feel truly benevolent towards them, and sincerely desire their spiritual and eternal good, and admit everything amiable and virtuous in their character and conduct; but if there appears any one thing in their character and conduct, which is not compatible with their having saving grace or vital piety, we ought to view them not as *visible saints*, but as *visible sinners*, in a guilty and perishing condition. There was but one thing that destroyed the apostle's charity towards his Jewish brethren; and that was something totally incompatible with true love to God and Christ. There are now various denominations of Christians, who exhibit every mark of piety but one thing, and at the same time exhibit one thing that is totally inconsistent with the least spark of saving grace. Of such, if we are really candid and unprejudiced, we must form the same unfavorable opinion that the apostle did of his Jewish brethren. And, in such a case, we ought not to be called bigoted, prejudiced, or censorious, in believing them to be entirely destitute of the grace of God. I know that many say, we ought to believe that every person in every religious denomination, who professes religion and lives a regular life, is a real saint; but Paul did not think so, nor say so: and we have no right to think so, nor say so. We ought to be candid in judging of the piety of others, and at the same time we ought to be impartial, and judge righteous judgment. One religious denomination have the same right to judge candidly and impartially of the piety of any other religious denomination, that Paul had to judge of the piety of his Jewish brethren; and if they do judge candidly and impartially on this very interesting subject, there is no more reason to call them bigoted and censorious, in case they judge unfavorably, than there was to call the apostle so.

2. It appears from this discourse, that gross ignorance of the essential doctrines of the gospel is totally incompatible with vital piety. The apostle believed this to be true, and acted accordingly. Though his Jewish brethren professed to be reli-

gious, though they externally obeyed the divine commands, and though they were very zealous in their religious devotions and exertions, yet he could not believe that they were pious, so long as they were grossly ignorant of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. They were grossly ignorant of the true character of God; they were grossly ignorant of the nature and extent of both the precept and penalty of the divine law; they were grossly ignorant of the entire depravity and sinfulness of their own hearts; they were grossly ignorant of the divinity and mediatorial character and conduct of Christ; and of course they were totally ignorant of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in the sufferings and death of the divine Redeemer. These were all essential doctrines of the gospel, and of these the Scribes and Pharisees, and Jews in general, were grossly ignorant. This ignorance the apostle supposed was entirely incompatible with their having any truly holy or gracious affection. And who would not have formed the same opinion that he did? I appeal to you, my hearers, whether you can believe any man to be the subject of saving grace, who is ignorant of the true character of God, of the true nature and extent of the precept and penalty of the divine law, of the criminality of his own totally depraved heart, of the divinity and mediatorial character of Christ, and of the ground of pardon and justification, through faith in his atonement. You can no more believe such a man is a real Christian, than you can believe that a man who never saw or heard of the Bible and what is in it, can be a real Christian. The apostle puts a similar question in our context. He asks, "How shall they (that is, the Gentiles) call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Who can love the true character of God, which he does not know? Who can obey the precepts and prohibitions of the divine law, which he does not understand? Who can make him a good heart, who does not know that he has a bad one? Who can trust in Christ alone for pardon and justification, who does not know what he has done to procure pardon and salvation for sinners? The apostle had good reason to think that the Jews were ignorant of the essential doctrines of the gospel, and that their ignorance alone was absolutely inconsistent with their having the grace of God in truth. And the mere ignorance of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel is as inconsistent with vital piety now, as it was in the apostle's day. Though ignorance may be the mother of devotion, it cannot be the mother of piety. Though the Jews had everything in

their favor but knowledge; yet the want of that alone was incompatible with vital piety. And the ignorance of thousands and thousands since, has undoubtedly proved fatal to them. The knowledge of the great and peculiar doctrines of the gospel, is essential to saving grace, or vital piety.

3. If mere ignorance of the essential doctrines of the gospel be incompatible with vital piety, then those who are ignorant of the essential doctrines of the gospel, cannot give credible evidence to others that they are real Christians, or subjects of saving grace. The Scribes and Pharisees, and Jews in general, publicly professed religion, and appeared devout and zealous in their religious services and exertions; but all these things did not convince the apostle that they had any true religion or vital piety, merely because they were ignorant of the pure and peculiar doctrines of the gospel. And while they were in this state of ignorance, what more could they have done that they did not do, to convince the apostle that they were real saints? And what more can any person at this day do, to convince others that they are real Christians, while they avow their ignorance of, and opposition to, the essential doctrines of the gospel? They cannot do any more than the Jews did. But men are generally more catholic and charitable now than the apostle Paul was. How often do we now hear pious and intelligent Christians say, that they believe such and such a man is a real Christian, though he is apparently ignorant of the true character of God, of the true spirit of the law, of the true nature of his own moral depravity, of the true character of the Saviour, and of the true terms of salvation through faith in his atonement? Mere ignorance of these essential doctrines of the gospel, and even open opposition to them, is no bar to their charity for him as a pious Christian. There are thousands in this land, who are such ignorant and heretical professors of religion: and yet many pious and intelligent Christians will believe that they are really and eminently pious. No man was a more bitter and open enemy to the essential doctrines of the gospel than Mr. Wesley. This I assert not from hearsay, but from his own words which he published, and I have read. Yet he was esteemed by multitudes as a most eminently devout and pious Christian, and his followers are still viewed in the same light. How often do we hear it said, that no man will be condemned on account of the denomination to which he belongs, nor on account of any false sentiments which he sincerely and devoutly embraces; because he may still be a very devout and eminent Christian. But I ask again, how is it possible that those who are ignorant of, and opposed to, the essential

doctrines of the gospel, can give credible evidence to others that they are truly pious? To me it appears impossible. For though they may profess religion; though they may practice the external duties of religion; and though they may have *religious affections;* yet it is certain that their religious affections are placed upon a false idea of God, upon a false idea of the divine law, upon a false idea of their own depravity, upon a false idea of the Saviour, and upon a false idea of the terms of salvation; and such affections must be as false as the objects upon which they are placed. It is, therefore, out of their power to give credible evidence to others that they have any true love to God, or to Christ, or to the gospel. The ignorance and error of such persons plainly contradict and destroy all the evidence they can give to others, that they are real saints or truly pious.

4. It appears from this discourse, that we are in danger, at this day, of exercising an unscriptural charity or catholicism towards nominal professors of religion. We are loudly and solemnly called upon by sermons and religious publications to extend our charity to almost all denominations of Christians, and to hold Christian communion and fellowship with them, and to lay aside all bigotry and censoriousness in respect to those who differ from us in their religious sentiments. It is undoubtedly our duty to lay aside all bigotry and censoriousness, and to become as benevolent, candid, and charitable towards all religious denominations as the apostle Paul was, but not to go beyond the example he has set us. He did not exercise charity towards his dear Jewish brethren, but viewed them as visible sinners, and not as visible saints, and exposed to perish forever. He exhorted true Christians to withhold their charity from them, and avoid fellowship and communion with them. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." The distinction between saints and sinners is as great now as ever it was, and the visibility of this distinction is as great now as ever it was. The apostle's exhortation to Christians in his day, applies to Christians at this day. Those at this day who are ignorant of, and opposed to the essential doctrines of the gospel, are not visible saints, but visible sinners. Are there not various denominations of Christians at

this day, who professedly disbelieve and openly oppose the essential doctrines of the gospel? Do they not disbelieve and oppose the true character of God, the true spirit of the law, the real depravity of their own hearts, the true character of Christ, and the true terms of salvation? Or, to put these ideas in different words, Do they not disbelieve and oppose the doctrine of divine sovereignty, the doctrine of election, the doctrine of reprobation, the doctrine of unconditional submission, the doctrine of disinterested benevolence, the doctrine of total depravity, the doctrine of Christ's atonement, and the doctrine of justification through faith in the Redeemer's blood? Would the apostle, do you think, admit such ignorant and erroneous persons to be visible Christians? And if he would not, why should we? I am speaking of different denominations of Christians, in respect to their religious sentiments which they avow, and not in respect to their personal conduct. We ought to be as benevolent and candid towards the most erroneous denominations of Christians as the apostle was, and feel and say as he did, It is our heart's desire and prayer to God, that they might be saved. But we ought not to be more catholic and charitable towards them than he was towards his erroneous Jewish brethren. It seems to be the opinion and practice of many at the present day to maintain, that it is not necessary to know whether men believe truth, or error, or nothing, in order to exercise charity towards them as real Christians. This is a very false, and dangerous, and corrupting sentiment. For if men can have true religion without any true knowledge of God, of Christ, and of themselves, it is impossible to know what true religion is. This is what every unsanctified heart wishes to be true, and is very ready to believe to be true. Any religion which is not according to knowledge, and which is not founded upon divine truth, is not worth having, but is worse than no religion. Unscriptural charity has a direct tendency to unite all denominations of Christians together, not in a holy, but unholy union, which is extremely dangerous. As it is the practice of the erroneous to propagate this unscriptural catholicism, so it is the duty of the orthodox to refute and expose it fully, to prevent its fatal influence upon the ignorant and unguarded.

5. If mere ignorance of the essential doctrines of the gospel be inconsistent with men's having true religion, there is reason to fear that many at this day will perish through this ignorance. Notwithstanding there is a great deal of preaching and a great deal of reading, on religious subjects at this day; yet there is much preaching and much reading which tends to divert

the minds of people from the great and most important truths of the gospel, and leaves them in gross ignorance of God, of Christ, and of themselves. Though people in general now have more knowledge of the different parts of the earth, of the various nations of the world, and of some of the useful arts and sciences, than they formerly had; yet there is no ground to think, that they have more knowledge of the Bible and the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, than they had many years ago. But on the other hand, great ignorance of divine truth appears to be extensively prevailing and increasing, in our religious societies, especially among the rising generation. This exhibits a melancholy prospect of great degeneracy in religion. It was by means of religious ignorance, that God's peculiar people became so generally and extremely degenerate as they were in Christ's and the apostle's day. And the same religious ignorance is now producing the same fatal effects. How many neglect the precious seasons they have of reading the Bible, and of hearing the gospel? May I not say as the apostle did, "I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." The ignorance of many of the young at least, exposes them to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, by those who lie in wait to deceive. There are, no doubt, some in the meridian of life, who being ignorant of God and their own hearts, are going about to establish their own righteousness, and building their hopes of heaven upon it. But if we may believe the apostle, they must renounce their own righteousness, and trust in Christ alone, who is the end of the law for righteousness. We believe there are some, who know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. This then "I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in *knowledge and in all judgment*." There never was more need of your becoming discriminating Christians, that you may become the salt of the earth and light of the world, and be able to instruct others, who need to be instructed in the first principles of the oracles of God. Error is coming in upon us like a flood, and it is your imperative duty to set up a standard against it, and be valiant for the truth. There is no duty, perhaps, which you are in greater danger of neglecting, than the duty of being valiant for the truth. It requires great courage and self-denial to stand up for God and speak on his behalf, in maintaining the great and precious truths which he has revealed in his word, and which are every day and everywhere spoken against. You can do more, in many cases, than ministers, in defence of the gospel, because you will be considered as

more candid, impartial and disinterested in your zeal for the promotion of truth, and for the detection, and suppression, and extirpation of great and fatal errors. Or should your holy zeal be resented by errorists, you have no ground to fear the evil they can do you, while acting under the Captain of your salvation. He has graciously said to the teachers and defenders of his gospel, " Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

SERMON XV.

GOOD MEN WITHOUT MERIT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."—Luke, xvii. 10.

Our Saviour seized every opportunity of instructing his disciples. If they proposed a question to him, he would frequently take the question for a theme of a serious and instructive discourse. Or if they made a request to him, he would take occasion from it, to read them a lecture on some seasonable and important subject. And whatever he said to his disciples, as well as to others, he would frequently illustrate by some appropriate parable, metaphor, or similitude. Our text is a part of a discourse, which was occasioned by a petition that the apostles made to him. "And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." To this Christ directly replies, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamore-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." This seems to be a gentle reproof for their weakness of faith, and designed to prepare them for larger measures of miraculous gifts. But lest they should value those gifts too highly, and themselves on account of them, he reads them a solemn lecture upon their own unworthiness for such supernatural qualifications for great and extensive service in his spiritual kingdom. To convince them, that they could merit nothing by their best services, he says, "But which of you having a servant plowing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go, and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he *thank* that ser-

vant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Now, if the apostles, who were eminent for their gifts and graces, could not do anything meritorious in the sight of God, but after all their labors and sufferings in the cause of Christ, were still unprofitable servants; then the best servants of God at this day, are far more unprofitable and unworthy in his sight. This, then, is the plain and serious truth which falls under our present consideration:

Though good men are the servants of God, yet they cannot merit any favor from him.

I. I shall show, that good men are the servants of God; and

II. That they cannot merit any favor at his hands.

I. I am to show that good men are the servants of God.

The apostles were good men, and as such, were the servants of God. Moses and the prophets were good men, and as such, were the servants of God. Indeed, this is the proper appellation of all good men. For,

1. They are the servants of God by creation. He made them, and made them for himself. He not only created, but renewed them, for the purpose of employing them in his service, and making them the voluntary instruments of promoting his glory. Accordingly, we read, "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." He has an original and independent right to their services. As his creatures, they are indispensably bound to labor for him in building up his kingdom. And he has a right to appoint their service, and determine in what ways and by what exertions, they shall carry into effect his wise and holy purposes. He has more authority over them than any master has over any servant. His authority is absolute and unlimited. He has a right to do what he will with his own. This, all good men feel and acknowledge. David acknowledges before God, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant;" and he repeats the acknowledgment, time after time, to express his cordial attachment and subjugation to his holy and gracious Sovereign.

2. Good men are the servants of God by dedication, as well as by creation. They have been led to realize and love the sovereignty of God. Their carnal mind, which once opposed his government, and refused to submit to his authority, has been slain. They have been made willing that he who hath made them, should reign over them. His law has been written

in their hearts, and they delight in it after the inward man. It is their choice that his law should be the rule by which to govern all their thoughts, and words, and actions. Hence, they have been disposed to dedicate themselves wholly to the Lord, to be his servants as long as they exist. They have resolved, like Joshua, that as for themselves, they will *serve* the Lord. Every good man can say with David, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments. While I live, will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being." Though some real saints have not made a public profession of religion, yet all who love God sincerely and supremely, have heartily consecrated themselves to the service of God, and resolved before him, that no other lords shall have dominion over them. So that all good men are the servants of God, by a free, voluntary, unreserved dedication of themselves to him forever. Besides,

3. They are his servants, by practice. They actually obey God in a sincere and acceptable manner. For,

In the first place, they do the things which God commands them to do. This is acting like proper servants. Christ represents a servant as actually doing the things commanded by his master. It is characteristic of good men, that they esteem God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and actually obey his commands and prohibitions. They allow not themselves to live in the neglect of any known duty, nor in disobedience to any known precept. They mean to make the word of God the rule of all their external conduct, and to do whatsoever he has commanded them to do, and refrain from doing whatsoever he has forbidden, in every relation, situation, connection, and circumstance of life. Nor do they rest satisfied with this; for,

In the next place, they do those things, which God has commanded them to do, *because he has commanded them.* Others do a great many things which God has required, but yet do not pay the least regard to his authority. They do such things as God has enjoined, because they appear necessary to answer their own purposes. But whatever God has required, which does not coincide with their own selfish interests, they totally neglect. Not so is the conduct of good men. They feel like good servants, who acknowledge the authority by which they are bound. They mean to submit their will to the will of God, and to act in obedience to it. They desire to know his will, and, like the Psalmist, pray that he would teach them his precepts, his statutes, and his commands. Like faithful servants, they seek to be directed in every part of their conduct.

They choose to walk in the ways of God, rather than in their own ways. They acknowledge God in all their ways, and look to him to direct their steps.

Furthermore, they not only regard the *will* of God, but the *glory* of God, in serving him. A good servant not only regards his master's authority, but his master's interest more than his own. And good men in this respect are the servants of God. They mean to do everything "heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men." Whether they eat, or drink, or whatsoever they do, they do all to the glory of God. It is their meat and drink, as it was Christ's, to do the will of their heavenly Father. As a good servant has no interest separate from his master's; so good men have no interest separate from the glory of God. They seek first the kingdom of God, and place their interest and happiness in doing his will and promoting his cause in the world. They seek not their own, but the things of God. Thus they completely answer the character of dutiful servants. They do what God commands, and because he commands it, and with a supreme regard to his glory. Like faithful servants, they employ all their time and talents in the service of their supreme Sovereign, and choose that all their services should redound to his glory.

II. But yet they cannot merit any favor from the hand of God. They are still unprofitable servants. Divines have sometimes distinguished merit into two kinds, and have called one kind the merit of *condignity*, and the other the merit of *congruity*. By the merit of condignity, they mean that which deserves a reward in point of justice. And by the merit of congruity, they mean that which is worthy of approbation, though not justly deserving a reward. But there appears no solid ground for this distinction. Nothing is really meritorious but what deserves a reward in point of justice. In this sense, one creature may lay another under obligation to reward him. The laborer is worthy of his hire, and his employer is bound in justice to reward him for the benefit he has received from his labor. But the great Creator is infinitely above all obligation to his dependent creatures. It is impossible, that they should do anything for his benefit, which should bind him, in point of justice, to reward them for their services. "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it *gain* to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" Again it is written, "If thou be righteous, what *givest* thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hands?" David acknowledges before God his unworthiness. "O my

soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord; my goodness extendeth not to thee." And the apostle speaking of the grace of God, puts the question, "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." That even good men cannot merit any favor at the hands of God, may be further illustrated by the following observations.

1. They cannot do anything more than what is their duty to do. This is the reason our Saviour gives, why they cannot merit any favor at the hands of God. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." The law of God requires every man to serve him to the full extent of all his natural powers and faculties. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." The servants to whom were committed various talents, were each of them required to improve them to the best advantage. The master always requires and expects, that the servant should employ all his time and strength in his service, which renders it impracticable for him to do anything more, than he is bound in duty to do. So good men, who are the servants of God, can never do anything more than their duty, and surely their bare performance of duty, cannot lay God under obligation, in point of justice, to reward them for it. It is the dictate of reason as well as scripture, that God cannot be indebted to them for any of their services. If they could act independently of God, and do something for him which he had not required, and which would be a proper benefit to him, it seems, in such a case, they would merit a reward. But it must be universally allowed, that they cannot act independently of God, or do that which he has not required, or that which would be *gain* to him, and of consequence, their best services cannot merit any good at his hands. Having done merely their duty, they cannot justly claim any reward.

2. The most faithful servants of God cannot merit any good from him, because they can never do so much for *him* as he has done for *them*. He has brought them out of nothing into being. He has given them all their powers and capacities of doing good. He has changed their hearts from sin to holiness, and made them willing in the day of his power to love and serve him. He has preserved their lives every moment, and loaded them with his favors every day. Now let the services which God has done for them be compared with the services which they have done for him, and on which side will the

greatest obligations lie? Have they been so constant in serving him, as he has been in serving them? He has served them, while they have been in a state of entire rest and insensibility. Have they exerted so much strength in serving him, as he has in serving them? Far from it. Their best services have been extremely weak and feeble, while he has employed his omnipotent hand in their favor. Have they exercised and expressed so much love in acting for him, as he has exercised and expressed in acting for them? Their love to him has been cold and languid, while his love to them has been infinitely strong and tender. Have they done anything for him which he could not have done for himself? But he has done ten thousand things for them, which they could not have done for themselves. If, therefore, the services which saints have done for God be thrown into one scale; and the services which God has done for them be thrown into the other, there can be no doubt which will outweigh. The services of God are unspeakably more numerous and more valuable, than the services of saints. Have they not then abundant reason to say, when they have done all things which God has commanded them to do, that they are still unprofitable servants; and in point of justice, owe their sovereign Lord ten thousand talents, which they are totally unable to pay? God has merited from them, but they have never merited from him. Besides,

3. The utter impossibility of saints meriting any favor at the hands of God by their obedience, plainly appears from the consideration of their disobedience. Our Saviour, indeed, does not suggest this consideration in the text. He goes upon the supposition of their being constantly and perfectly obedient, and doing everything that is commanded them; and even upon this ground he pronounces them unprofitable servants. But it is a truth intimately connected with this subject, that the best of men fall far short of yielding perfect obedience to the commands of God. They have been dead in trespasses and sins, and lived in real rebellion against their rightful Lord and Sovereign. And though they are become in a measure reconciled to God, and paid him some sincere obedience, yet they are still very barren and unfruitful trees in his vineyard. They have been far from yielding a steady and uniform obedience to the divine commands, but frequently disobey his known will. Their obedience must be set in contrast to their disobedience, in order to determine what they have merited at the hands of God. But there is no proportion between the merit of obedience and the demerit of disobedience. Their obedience merits no good, but their disobedience merits infinite evil, in point of

justice. The least act of disobedience deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and in that which is to come. So that one act of disobedience outweighs a whole life of obedience, in point of justice; therefore they deserve everlasting destruction, as much as if they had never done a single act of obedience. Their obedience to the divine law makes no atonement for their disobedience, and has no influence at all to free them from the penalty of eternal death. They deserve, in strict justice, to be cast off forever, and suffer the due reward of their ungodly deeds. As guilty and unprofitable servants, they merit evil, and nothing but evil, at the hands of their injured and offended sovereign. This Jacob felt, when he said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant." This Nehemiah and Daniel felt, when they prayed for their guilty nation. The infinite demerit of sin always carries conviction to good men, who are the real servants of God, that they have merited all evil, but no good, at the hands of God, and nothing but unmerited mercy can save them from endless ruin.

I might now proceed to improve the subject, were it not for one objection, which may arise in the minds of some against the leading sentiment in this discourse. Some may be ready to ask, Is not the sincere obedience of good men really holy and pleasing to God? Is it not as really worthy of reward as the obedience of angels, or as the obedience of Adam would have been, if he had never sinned? And did not good men under the law view their obedience as pleasing to God, and worthy of his approbation and reward? Hezekiah said, "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." And Nehemiah expresses the same views and feelings. "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof." To this plausible objection I would answer,

1. The services of good men are really pleasing to God.

2. He may bestow good upon them, both in this life and in the life to come, as a *token* of his *approbation* of their cordial obedience. But yet,

3. He cannot *reward* their obedience, as an act of *justice*. Justice requires God to punish sinners for their disobedience, but it does not require him to show favor to good men for their obedience. The rewards which God promises to bestow upon the godly under the Old Testament, were rewards of goodness, not rewards of justice. And such were the rewards that Heze-

kiah and Nehemiah desired and prayed for. Christ promised to reward any of his disciples for the least benevolent act, even the giving of a cup of water in sincerity. But the reward he promised was a reward of goodness, not of justice. After God has forgiven good men, through the atonement of Christ, he can give them any favor as a token or expression of his approbation, but not as an act of his justice. Though they have no claims upon the justice of God, yet they have claims upon his gracious promises. Though a servant cannot merit any favor at the hands of his master; yet if his master have promised to bestow any favor upon him for any particular act of obedience or fidelity, he may claim the promise, when he has performed the condition upon which it was made. So good men, who are the servants of God, and cannot merit any favor, in point of justice, at the hands of God, may nevertheless claim the favors which God has promised to give them as a token of his approbation of their cordial obedience. Godliness had the promise of this life and of that which is to come under the Old Testament, as well as under the New. And this promise does not now, and never did, imply that saints merit any favor at the hands of God for their obedience.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If good men cannot merit any favor at the hands of God, then the terms of the gospel are not inconsistent with the grace of God in their salvation. The principal conditions of the gospel are faith and repentance, which are really virtuous and holy exercises. And if these exercises of good men do not *merit* any favor at the hands of God, then they are not inconsistent with their being pardoned and saved through *mere grace*. There are two denominations of Christians, who deny that the gospel offers pardoning mercy to sinners upon any conditions to be performed on their part. These are Antinomians and Sandemanians. The Antinomians say, that if sinners are required to repent and believe in order to obtain pardon and acceptance in the sight of God, then their pardon and acceptance cannot be of free grace, but of works, which are repugnant to free grace. They say, that faith and repentance are good works; and if these are the conditions of salvation, then men are saved by works, and not by grace. Accordingly, they deny that the covenant of grace has any conditions. They deny that God says in the covenant of grace to sinners, if you will repent and believe, I will save you; but assert, on the contrary, that the

language of God, in the covenant of grace, runs in this form :— "I will show you mercy, and ye shall be saved, without any condition of faith and repentance on your part." The Sandemanians say, that men are passive in believing the gospel, and never put forth any gracious exercises in this life, because this would be inconsistent with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. Both these denominations of Christians deny that God offers salvation to sinners, in the gospel, upon the condition of faith, or repentance, or any other holy affection; because any such condition, they suppose, would be inconsistent with their being saved by free grace. But if neither faith, nor repentance, nor any other act of obedience, can lay God under obligation, in point of justice, to show any favor to sinners, then he may display as much grace in pardoning and saving them upon condition of their faith, or repentance, or obedience, as in pardoning and saving them without any condition at all. There is a wide and essential difference between the ground or foundation of pardon and any condition of it. The sole ground of God's pardoning penitents, is the *atonement* of Christ; but the *condition* of his pardoning them, is their love, repentance, faith, submission, and persevering obedience. And though these are really good works, yet they are not *meritorious*. They lay God under no obligation, in point *of justice*, to show them any temporal or eternal favor. These good works, however, are not the works of the law, which the apostle excludes from justification. By the works of the law, the apostle means the dead works of sinners, which flow from their corrupt and totally depraved hearts. But he does not mean to exclude that faith, that repentance, or that obedience which flows from supreme love to God, from being a condition of pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. If love, repentance, faith, and obedience were inconsistent with the grace of God in justification, they would be equally inconsistent with the grace of God in glorification. Or if the good works of good men here in this world were inconsistent with the grace of God in their pardon and salvation, they would be equally inconsistent with their pardon and acceptance in heaven. And upon this supposition, no man *with holiness* can see the Lord; because holiness in men is inconsistent with the display of *divine grace* towards them. There is no occasion, therefore, to deny the conditions of the gospel, in order to see the grace of God in the pardon and salvation of sinful and infinitely ill-deserving creatures. The very love, and faith, and repentance which the gospel requires sinners to exercise, in order to pardon and salvation, lead them to renounce all self-righteousness and self-de-

pendence, and to cast themselves upon the *sovereign grace* of God for pardon and eternal life.

2. If good men cannot merit any favor at the hands of God, then the more they grow in grace, the more sensible they will be of their unworthiness of the least mercy. The more they grow in grace, the more sensible they are of their great imperfection in holiness, and of the great criminality of their imperfection, which seems to increase their humiliation and self-abasement before God. Good men have always found this to be true by their own experience. Job never perhaps grew in grace faster than while he was under the chastening hand of God. And in that situation he had peculiar views of his own unworthiness, notwithstanding all his past love and obedience and submission to God. He says to him, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." David declares, "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad." Ezra said, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee." But Paul expresses himself the most strikingly upon this subject. He says, "I am *less than the least of all saints.*" The reason of this was, not because he had the least grace, but because he had the most guilt. So he tells us himself. "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all." The more righteous he was, the more he renounced his own righteousness; the more good works he did, the more he renounced his good works; and the nearer he approached to perfect obedience, the further he was from claiming the least merit on account of it. Though he knew that he had more holiness than other saints, yet he was convinced that he had more guilt, and consequently he was less than the least of all saints, in respect to any merit in the sight of God. His demerit absorbed all his merit. He had no claim upon divine justice, but relied alone upon divine mercy. Grace enables good men to see and lament their imperfection and unworthiness, but not to see and boast of their meritorious services. And it will have this effect upon them, not only through this life, but through the boundless ages of eternity. Perfect holiness in heaven will produce a deep sense of perfect unworthiness and ill desert.

3. If good men cannot merit anything at the hand of God, then the doctrine of their final perseverance in grace has no

tendency to make them negligent in duty. Many are very much opposed to the sentiment of Calvinists, that all real saints will never finally fall from grace, but certainly persevere in holiness until they reach the kingdom of heaven. Though this doctrine be plainly revealed in the Bible, and is capable of being fully proved, yet many objections have been raised against it, and among others, the most plausible is, that it tends to licentiousness. The opposers of the doctrine say, that it leads those who embrace it, to neglect their duty, and to imagine their salvation is secure, though they continue to live and die in such negligence. This is not true of good men; for the more goodness they have, the more they are sensible of their great imperfection and ill desert in the sight of God; and the more absolutely they renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependence, in point of justification before God; and the more sincerely and ardently they desire to make advances in a holy and devout life. Though Paul believed the doctrine of the final perseverance of saints, yet it served to encourage and quicken him in duty rather than to neglect it. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." All sincere believers feel as Paul did, and their belief of finally persevering in holiness, tends to make them more holy, instead of less; to make them more watchful, instead of less; and to make them more, instead of less, strict in their obedience to the divine commands. There is no doubt that unrenewed persons, who entertain a false hope of salvation, may abuse the doctrine of the final perseverance of saints to licentiousness, and to fall away from what they once thought was grace in their hearts. It is not strange, therefore, that those who deny the necessity of regeneration, and maintain the doctrine of justification by works, should imagine that the doctrine of the final perseverance of saints tends to licentiousness. For all unholy, unrenewed persons, do love to live in disobedience to God rather than in obedience to him, and choose to be saved *in* sin rather than *from* it.

4. If Christians cannot merit any good at the hands of God; then the more obedient they are, the more they feel their need of pardoning mercy, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the more they serve God, the more they feel their obligations to serve him; and the more sensible they are of their short-comings in duty, and of their ill-desert on account of their criminal imperfection. Instead of boasting of their

good works, they mourn and lament their daily disobedience, which leads them to trust more and more in the atoning blood of Christ for pardoning mercy at the hands of God. This Paul freely and fully acknowledges to be true concerning himself, notwithstanding all his proficiency in holiness and obedience. Speaking in the name of his fellow Christians he says, "We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were *gain* to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things *but loss* for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." The longer Christians live in this world, and the more they grow in grace and are constant in the discharge of duty, the more they renounce all dependence on their own righteousness; and the more absolutely they rely alone upon the atonement of Christ for forgiving grace: or the more sensibly and constantly they live by faith in Jesus Christ.

5. If real Christians, who are the dutiful and obedient servants of God, dare not depend upon anything they do, to recommend them to the mercy of God; then it is great presumption for sinners to rely upon anything they do, to recommend them to the divine acceptance. All their internal desires and external conduct flow from a carnal mind, which is enmity to God, and therefore highly displeasing to him. If the prayer of the upright, which is his delight, cannot recommend him to pardoning mercy, how much less can the prayer of the wicked, which is an abomination, recommend him to the divine favor? If the good works of good men cannot merit any favor at the hand of God, then surely the sinful works of sinners cannot recommend them to that sovereign mercy, which they hate and oppose. The impenitent are extremely apt to trust in themselves that they are righteous, and that their conduct is pleasing to God, and that they stand higher in his favor than the penitent. This Christ illustrated in a striking manner, by the parable of the Pharisee and publican. The Pharisee boasted

in his self-righteousness, and despised the poor penitent publican. But the publican, who renounced his own righteousness, and cast himself upon mere unpromised mercy, obtained pardon and acceptance, while the self-righteous, boasting Pharisee was condemned and rejected. Sinners labor in vain and spend their strength for nought, so long as they seek to recommend themselves to God, by their good nature, or by their good works, or by their selfish, insincere, and unsubmissive prayers. They must freely and sincerely renounce all their self-righteousness and self-dependence, before they can accept of mere sovereign mercy upon the self-denying terms of the gospel. The lofty looks of man must be humbled, and the haughtiness of men must be bowed down, before God can be exalted in showing them mercy. This subject, therefore, now calls upon self-righteous sinners in particular, to look into their own hearts to see how they appear in the eyes of a holy God. Though their external conduct shines in the eyes of the world, and in their own eyes; yet their hearts appear infinitely odious and criminal in the sight of a sin-hating God. A clear sight of the plague of your own hearts will prove death to all your self-righteous hopes, and lay you prostrate at the foot of sovereign mercy. Christ has told you, that "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." According as you comply, or refuse to comply with this condition of mercy, you will go down to your houses justified, or condemned.

SERMON XVI.

PETER'S HEARERS.

"THEN they that gladly received his word, were baptized."—Acts, ii. 41.

JUST before Christ ascended to heaven, he called his eleven disciples together, and "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." They obeyed this command, and retired to Jerusalem, where they abode together, and spent their time in prayers and supplications for the promised presence and influence of the Father, until the day of Pentecost, when "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? and how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and in Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia, about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." While this mixed multitude was in this peculiar situation, the apostle Peter rose up and addressed them in a very pertinent, pathetic, and impressive manner. He charged them with the guilt of crucifying Jesus of Nazareth; assured them that he was risen from the dead, and had ascended up to heaven, where he would reign until he had made his enemies his footstool. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then

Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." The text taken in this connection, leads us to consider,

I. The character which those who received the gospel sustained before they received it.

II. Why they received it gladly.

III. Why they were immediately baptized.

I. Let us consider the character which those who received the gospel sustained before they received it. Peter addressed them as Jews, and calls them the "men of Israel, and the house of Israel." They had all lived in Jerusalem, or, at least, had been there and attended the Jewish festivals. The apostles were directed to preach the gospel at Jerusalem before they preached it anywhere else. They were now at Jerusalem, and Peter preached his first sermon there after the resurrection of Christ. His hearers, therefore, must have been Jews. This leads me to observe,

1. That before he preached to them, they were great sinners. They had the Bible in their own hands, and had heard Moses and the prophets read from Sabbath to Sabbath. They heard not only their own teachers, but John the Baptist, who was a gospel preacher, and called upon all who heard him to repent and believe in the promised Messiah. This we may safely conclude, because we are told that all Jerusalem and all Judea flocked to hear this extraordinary preacher. As soon as John deceased, Christ followed him, and preached with superior power and pungency. It is natural to suppose, that those who heard Peter had heard Jesus, who drew multitudes after him, by his persuasive and pointed preaching. And this seems to be confirmed by Peter's telling them that they had actually seen his miracles. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." They knew that they had seen Christ and his astonishing signs and miracles, by which he demonstrated the truth and divinity of the doctrines which he taught. But notwithstanding all the light and truth which had been exhibited before their eyes, they had still remained stupid and impenitent unbelievers. They had

rejected the counsel of God against themselves, and their guilt had increased in proportion to the light and truth with which they had been favored. As light was poured into their minds, they waxed worse and worse. The oftener they saw the miracles of Christ, and heard the solemn truths he inculcated, the more they hated him. Their hatred rose to enmity, and their enmity to malignity. Twice they took up stones to stone him, and once they led him to the verge of a precipice with an intent to destroy him. After all these attempts failed, they charged him with blasphemy, by which they procured his condemnation and death. This Peter expressly told them they had done. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." They saw his patience, meekness, and submission under their cruel hands. They heard his piercing cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" They heard his prayer for their forgiveness, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." They saw him bow his head and give up the ghost. They saw the earth tremble, the sun withdraw its light, the graves open, and the dead arise. But nothing they saw or heard would soften their stony hearts. Were they not then sinners above all men? But though they had maintained their obstinacy under the preaching of John, and under the preaching of Christ, and under the tremendous scenes of his crucifixion, yet they could not resist the force of Peter's preaching. He told them that they had been fighting against God in crucifying his Son; that he had raised his Son from the dead, seated him at his own right hand, and given him power to destroy his enemies. He quoted and applied the words of David, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" This leads me to observe,

2. That under the preaching of Peter, his hearers became convinced of their sins, and of their perishing condition as sinners. This quotation of the apostle from the Psalms, and his application of it to Christ whom they had crucified, struck their hearts instantaneously like a flash of lightning. They recollected in a moment that when the high-priest asked Christ, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" that Jesus said, "I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right

hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." They recollected that he had declared himself to be the Son of God; that he had confirmed his declaration by incontestable miracles; that he had taught the doctrine of the resurrection of the just and of the unjust; the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, and given a striking representation of the process of the general judgment. They were fully convinced, that he was both Lord and Christ; that he had power and authority to destroy both soul and body in hell; and that they justly deserved to suffer the weight of his wrath forever. This made them feel that they were in "the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity." They knew not what to do, nor which way to turn to escape the wrath to come. Peter then poured into their wounded minds the most pertinent and salutary instructions. "Then said he unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." They now judged and condemned themselves, and renounced their enmity to God and to Christ. They melted down into deep contrition and godly sorrow for sin. They loathed and abhorred themselves. They did what Peter required them to do. They sincerely repented. They felt like the humble publican, the returning prodigal, and the self-condemned malefactor whom they had seen expire on the cross. We have a right to believe they had such submissive, penitential, humiliating exercises of heart, because it is said, "They gladly received the word," and because without such views and feelings, they could not renounce their self-righteousness and self-dependence, and resign themselves up to the sovereign grace of God, through the mediation of Christ.

This leads us to consider,

II. Why they gladly received the gospel. And here I would observe,

1. It was because they saw no other possible way of obtaining pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. They felt that God might justly cast them off forever, because they had been his mortal enemies, having not only transgressed his commands, but imbrued their hands in the blood of his Son. They not only felt their desert of everlasting destruction from the hand of their holy and injured Saviour; but felt as though he must make them the monuments of his eternal wrath. They were, therefore, in great distress, and anxiously concerned to find relief from their painful apprehensions. This prepared them to

hear with joy the glad tidings of the gospel. Peter told them, that there was forgiveness with God and plenteous redemption; and that if they would only repent and believe in Him whom they had crucified and slain, they should receive remission of sin, however guilty and ill-deserving they had been. This gave them a ray of hope, that though their sins had abounded, the grace of God might much more abound in their salvation. They totally despaired of finding any other way of escaping deserved destruction. Though they had once relied on their own righteousness and external obedience to the law of Moses, yet now having seen the plague of their own hearts, and the justice of God in the penalty of the law, their guilt revived and their false hopes died. And in this view of their wretched condition, they were extremely glad to receive the gospel. They were willing to believe what they had so often disbelieved, that Christ was the way, the truth, and the life, and the only name given under heaven among men, whereby they could be saved. Such are the views and feelings of all penitent sinners. As soon as they love God, and become reconciled to his punitive justice, they see that they must perish, unless mere mercy prevent; and they see not how mercy can prevent, until the gospel is brought into view, which they are prepared to embrace with joy. It was in such a view of their perishing condition, that Peter's penitent hearers gladly received the word.

2. They gladly embraced the gospel which he preached, because they saw it to be perfectly suited to their case and afforded them just such relief as they wanted. They wanted pardon, and they wanted it in a way consistent with the honor of God, whom they had dishonored and injured. They saw that Christ by his death on the cross had done all that was necessary to be done to atone for their sins, to secure the glory of God his Father in pardoning and saving the most guilty, penitent, returning sinners. Peter in the course of his long and instructive sermon clearly opened to their view the nature, necessity, and design of Christ's death. He taught them that they had only been the instruments of fulfilling the divine purpose in the vicarious sufferings of Christ, who died the just for the unjust to atone for the sins of the world. He showed them how his death displayed the same justice of God, which he would have displayed, if he had treated all mankind as he treated the fallen angels. And consequently that he could be just in justifying and saving all who rely alone upon the atonement of Christ for pardoning mercy. And surely such a gospel was suited to give joy and gladness to those who were wil-

ling to be saved, upon the most gracious, and yet the most humiliating terms. They could joyfully renounce their boasted distinction as Jews, give up their self-righteousness, self-justifying pleas, and cry with the publican, "God be merciful to us sinners," through him who had died for us. As penitents, they did not deserve to be pardoned for their repentance, but chose to be justified freely by grace through the redemption of Christ. They were glad not only to be pardoned, but to be pardoned in the way which Peter pointed out. They received his word with joy, because they regarded the glory of God more than merely their freedom from condemnation. Besides,

3. They received the gospel gladly, because it opened the door of mercy to all other penitent sinners, as well as to themselves. They then felt as all other penitents feel, a tender concern for all who appear to be in the road to ruin. It gave them great joy that day, and from day to day, that the glad tidings of the gospel were going to be proclaimed to a guilty and perishing world. Accordingly we are told in the words following the text, how they daily spent their time in prayer and praise for the spread and success of the gospel, which they had embraced. They saw themselves and all mankind in a new light. They beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. They read and understood, and admired the types and predictions respecting Christ in the Old Testament, and saw how he had completely answered and fulfilled them. They could as clearly see and admire the predictions of the future enlargement and glory of the Messiah's kingdom on earth, and carry their views to the final consummation of the great work of redemption, and the eternal holiness and happiness of all that should finally reach the kingdom of glory. A gospel that brought so much good to them, and to millions of their poor, perishing fellow-men, and so much glory to God and to the divine Redeemer, could not fail to give them peace and joy in believing. They had just ground to rejoice in the good treasure and rich pearl they found in the gospel. Now, it is not difficult to see,

III. Why they were so ready to be baptized. This is expressly mentioned as something worthy of notice. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." They had become new creatures; old things had passed away, and all things become new. They had come out of great darkness into great light. They were divinely illuminated, and were in the joyful exercise of holy affections. They had no grounds for doubts and fears about the sincerity of their love, repentance,

or faith. They were desirous to be immediately baptized for various reasons. And,

1. Because they wished to do public honor to Christ in whom they had believed and found mercy. Though they had once despised, and hated, and rejected him, and even imbrued their hands in his blood; yet they now renounced their disaffection and enmity, and loved him for the very same things for which they had hated and crucified him. Their love was enhanced by a sense of their former hatred and opposition, and they felt that they could not do too much to promote the honor of him, whom they had done so much to dishonor and destroy. They wished to be baptized in his name, in order to give evidence to the world that they were not ashamed of him. They saw good reasons why Christ should require this at their hands, and at the hands of all his penitent despisers and rejecters. It appeared altogether proper, that they should publish to the world, that they had altered their feelings towards their glorious and blessed Saviour, and had resolved to take up the cross and suffer all the reproach that the enemies of the gospel should cast upon them. When they asked what they should do to be saved, Peter plainly told them they must repent and be baptized. They knew that they were as much required to be baptized, as to repent; and they were as willing to obey this command of Christ, as to obey any other of his self-denying commands. They could not justify it to themselves to be reluctant, or dilatory in professing Christ before men, and bearing the badge of his disciples before the eyes of a frowning world. They knew it would indicate insincerity and want of supreme love to Christ, to neglect complying with an ordinance which he had appointed for the very purpose of testing their sincerity. They knew, that many had pretended to believe on him, but had exposed their hypocrisy by shrinking from a public profession. This their sincere and supreme love to Christ forbid them to do.

2. Peter's converts were immediately baptized, because they felt a sincere and ardent desire to lead others to embrace the gospel which they had embraced, and to obtain the happiness which they had obtained. They knew the guilty and dangerous state of sinners, by their own past experience; and they knew the happy effects of embracing the gospel, and it was their heart's desire and prayer to God, that others might find the same peace and joy in believing that they had found. Accordingly, we are told, "That they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," and going "from house to house," and "the Lord

added to the church daily such as should be saved." The spirit of the gospel which they gladly received, inspired them with love to the souls of men, and fired them with a pure and holy zeal to promote the cause of Christ, by inducing others to believe in him and name his name. If they had not been baptized after their conversion, they would not have alarmed sinners in the manner they did; for it was not until after this solemn ordinance was administered to them, that "*fear* came upon every soul." To see three thousand baptized the same day, to find that they afterwards continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, was directly calculated to fill the minds of sinners with fear, and carry conviction to their guilty consciences. It is often found at this day, that it is not a vain thing for true converts to confess Christ before men, and be baptized in his name. It has frequently proved the means of awakening and converting sinners.

3. There was another good reason which induced those who gladly received the word to be baptized; and that was to bind themselves to obey all the commands of Christ. If they had neglected to obey his first command, they would have had no confidence in themselves that they should prove obedient in time to come. Though they then felt willing to do whatsoever he had commanded them; yet they might suffer their love and zeal to cool, and neglect to yield a constant and persevering obedience to all the intimations of his will. To prevent this unhappy consequence, they gladly embraced the first opportunity to give in their names to Christ, and put themselves under the bonds of a solemn covenant, to walk in all the commands and ordinances of the gospel, and to adorn the doctrines which they had cordially embraced, and which the world disbelieved, despised, and opposed. They saw the intimate connection between conversion and obedience. When they really embraced the gospel, they felt an immediate obligation to comply with all the duties which are required in it. And this conviction constrained them to be baptized, as well as to repent and believe. And who can say that they did not think and act consistently, when they had gladly received the gospel, to be baptized, in honor of Christ, in honor of religion, and in safety to themselves. It was their baptism that gave the most visible and credible evidence that their love, their repentance, their faith, and their joy was genuine.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the views, and feelings, and conduct of those who embraced the gospel on the day of Pentecost, that repentance not only may be, but must be, before faith in Christ. Some suppose faith may be before repentance. Some suppose it must be before repentance. And some suppose it may be either before or after repentance; and consider it a matter of mere speculation, and of very little importance to investigate the truth upon this subject. Each of these suppositions is entirely groundless. There is no reason to think that faith in Christ may be before repentance of sin. It is true, that sinners may believe in the existence of God, in the truth of the gospel, and in the truth of what the gospel reveals concerning the person, the life and death of Christ, and his mediatorial character, before they repent of sin. But this is not saving faith. The devils believe all this and tremble; and so may sinners while they continue impenitent and enemies to Christ. The question before us is, whether they may exercise saving faith in Christ, and become cordially united to him, before they exercise repentance towards God, whose law they have broken, and whose displeasure they have incurred. It is difficult to see how such a saving faith may be before genuine repentance of sin. Supposing Peter's hearers had not repented, could they have gladly received the word, and believed in Christ to the saving of their souls? If they could have believed before repentance, they might have been pardoned before repentance. But Peter exhorted them to repent before, and in order to the remission of sins. If they could have believed before they repented, they might have been pardoned before they repented; and if they could have been pardoned before they repented, they might have been saved before they repented, and, indeed, without ever repenting. Repentance, therefore, not only may be, but must be, before faith in Christ and forgiveness of sins. It is contrary to the nature of things, that sinners should believe in Christ before they repent of sin; and it is contrary to the terms of the gospel, that they should be forgiven before they repent, and believe in Christ. So that repentance must be before both faith and forgiveness. It now follows of course, that it is not a matter of mere speculation, or little importance, whether repentance be before faith. Those who deny that repentance is before faith, generally and tenaciously maintain that faith may be, and must be, before repentance. And on this ground they build a whole scheme of false religion. They say faith

must be before repentance, because sinners cannot repent of sin before they believe their sins are forgiven. But after they believe Christ died for them in particular, and God has forgiven their sins on his account; then they may love God and repent of sin. But such love and repentance flow from mere selfishness, and is consistent with entire enmity to God in his true character, to Christ in his true character, and to the whole gospel rightly understood. It is the essence of Antinomianism, which is subversive of all true experimental religion. It is, therefore, of great practical importance to prove and maintain, that repentance is before faith, and that faith cannot be before repentance. All the inspired writers of the Old Testament always place repentance before forgiveness, and all the writers of the New Testament place repentance before forgiveness and before faith. When John baptized in the wilderness, he preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. "After that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel." And Paul says it was his practice in preaching the gospel, "to testify both to the Jews, and also, to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The preaching of the doctrine of repentance before faith, directly tends to detect and refute the false and fatal errors of Antinomians, Moravians, Christians, Methodists, and a large portion of Calvinists. The most false and dangerous schemes of experimental religion are founded upon this false principle—that faith is before repentance, and every other Christian grace. There is scarcely any other principle of the gospel of more practical importance to be preached, and to be understood, than this—that repentance is before faith. Whoever clearly understands, believes, and loves this plain, simple truth—that repentance is before faith, is completely guarded against every selfish and false scheme of religion, and all the errorists that abound at the present day. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance, that every one should understand this truth.

2. We learn from the character of Peter's hearers before they received the word gladly, why sinners are naturally disposed to make light of the gospel.

Mankind have always been naturally disposed to despise the gospel, whether preached by priests, by prophets, or by Christ himself. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had for several years despised Christ and the gospel which he preached. And for aught that appears to the contrary, Peter's hearers joined with

sadducees, Pharisees, publicans, and other sinners, in despising the gospel which they had heard Christ and the apostles preach before the crucifixion of Christ and the day of Pentecost. And on the morning of that day, they probably united their hearts and voices with the multitude, in deriding and reproaching the apostles and other followers of the risen and ascended Redeemer, who had been waiting for, and had received the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost. But how did it come to pass, that the three thousand, like the rest of the sinners in Zion, continued to despise the gospel until a few hours before they fell confounded, convicted, and prostrate under it? It was because they had been totally blind to their guilt and danger. They had despised and crucified the Lord of glory ignorantly in unbelief. They had been ignorant of the character and law of God, and the deep depravity of their own hearts. They felt that they were whole and had no need of a physician, and knew not that from the sole of the foot even unto the head there was no soundness in them, and that they were full of mortal wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores. They verily thought they were in spiritual health, while the symptoms of spiritual and eternal death were upon them. They felt no need of the salvation offered to them in the gospel; and therefore they made light of it, until Peter pointedly charged them with the aggravated guilt of crucifying Him, whom God had made both Lord and Christ. This, like a barbed arrow, pierced their hearts and fastened conviction on their consciences, and constrained them to cry in extreme anguish, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They no longer despised the gospel, but gladly embraced the terms of salvation. Human nature is still the same, and those who are under the dominion and blinding influence of a carnal mind, are exposed to as great error, delusion, and stupidity as the crucifiers of Christ. Atheists, deists, heretics, worldlings, and all impenitent sinners, as much despise and lightly esteem the gospel, as sadducees, Pharisees, publicans and sinners did in Christ's day, and for the same reason, blindness to their own guilt and danger. Our Saviour foresaw, and in the parable of the marriage feast, foretold how sinners would treat the gospel. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, who made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden, to the wedding; and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made *light* of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchan-

dise." The gospel still makes the same free, rich, precious offers to sinners, but they still make light of it. The reason is, they think they are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." But,

3. It appears from what happened to Peter's hearers, that no sinners are out of the reach of conviction. No sinners, perhaps, were ever more secure in their guilt and stupidity, than the three thousand were on the day of Pentecost. In the morning they made light of the gospel, made a mock of sin, and bid defiance to the awakening, convincing, and converting influences of the Holy Ghost. They made their brow brass, and their neck as an iron sinew. But before the sun had reached the meridian, their lofty looks were humbled, and their haughtiness bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted in their hearts. This was indeed the most signal display of the sovereign and irresistible grace of God in the conversion of the most hardened and obstinate sinners. But there have been many similar displays of the powerful and gracious influences of the divine Spirit in the conversion of the despisers of the gospel. It is vain for sinners to contend with their Maker; he is stronger than they; and "who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" All the ease and security sinners enjoy is altogether owing to their ignorance of God and of their own hearts. It is easy for God at any time, in his house, or in any other place, to arrest sinners, and lay them prostrate at his footstool. He arrested Manasseh in the height of his stupidity and obstinacy, and humbled him in the dust. He arrested Saul of Tarsus in his way to Damascus, and while intent on persecuting Christ and his followers. And he has in innumerable instances, bowed stout-hearted sinners to a cordial and unreserved submission to his amiable and holy sovereignty. It argues extreme folly and stupidity in any sinners to imagine, that they are out of the reach of conviction, because they have resisted great light and maintained their ease and stupidity for a great while. The three thousand had done this for a great while, and under solemn warnings and admonitions; but they were arrested and conquered at last. And so may those who are now ringleaders in sin, soon find themselves to be in the hands of an angry God, who can save or destroy, and out of whose hands there is none to deliver.

4. The conversion of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost shows us one reason, why God often suffers sinners to triumph in their wickedness before a revival of religion. God often did this, under the Mosaic dispensation. There were

many declensions and revivals of religion from Moses to Christ. And we frequently read of the great prevalence of stupidity and degeneracy in Israel, before any extraordinary effusion of the divine Spirit. It appears from what has been said, that the love of many had waxed cold, and iniquity had risen to an enormous height in Jerusalem and Judea, before the day of Pentecost. Sadducees and Pharisees, publicans and sinners had become extremely erroneous and corrupt. John had been beheaded. Christ and his followers had been despised and abused, and the Lord of glory had been crucified and slain. That generation had become notoriously wicked and hardened in sin, so that the blood of all the prophets was about to be required at their hands. But when there appeared no hope in their case, then the promise of the Holy Ghost was fulfilled, and an extraordinary revival took place. Three thousand were converted on one day. By this God meant to show that he was stronger than the strong man armed, and able to bow the hearts of the most hardened sinners after they had triumphed in their wickedness and opposition to the gospel. After the most powerful external means had failed to conquer the carnal mind of sinners, he gave visible and undeniable evidence, that he was able to slay it, and reconcile his most inveterate enemies to himself. This was an end worthy of God to propose and bring to pass. And hence we may conclude, that this is an end which he has in view in suffering some whom he intends to save, to live long in their impenitence and unbelief, and spread error, stupidity, and high-handed wickedness among a degenerate people, before he arises to plead his own cause, and appears in his glory in building up Zion. As the greatest darkness of the night is just before day; so the greatest darkness and degeneracy among a people, is often just before a great and extensive effusion of the divine Spirit. The blindness and stupidity of the human heart has led many under the gospel to disbelieve and deny the necessity of the special and irresistible influence of the Spirit to change the hearts of sinners, and raise them from spiritual death to spiritual life. But when God causes the Ethiopian to change his skin and the leopard his spots, and turns the lion into the lamb, he carries conviction to all that it is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in their eyes.

5. This subject forbids us to despair of God's reviving religion in this place. The erroneous, the stupid, and the presumptuous are triumphing and breaking over all restraints. The Sabbath, the gospel, and all the means of grace, have lost their restraining influence. Those who once attended public

worship have done attending, and those who once constantly attended, have become inconstant. Some who once employed their authority and weight of character, to suppress and prevent the prevalence of vice and immorality, have lost their resolution, courage, and zeal, and relaxed their exertions; and but very few dare stand in the gap, appear on the Lord's side, and lift up a standard against the enemy that are coming in like a flood. Is there not then some ground to hope, that God is waiting to be gracious? that he intends to take his own work into his own hands, and bow the hearts of this people to himself as the heart of one man, and make a signal display of the riches of his grace? It is certainly time to cry, "Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." And who can tell but he will hear, and pour out a blessing that there shall not be room to receive it?

6. It appears from the conduct of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, that it is very easy for sinners to comply with the terms of the gospel and secure the salvation of their souls. How often do sinners complain, that the terms of the gospel are hard and unreasonable; and that they cannot comply with them. Peter proposed as high terms as any preacher ever proposed to sinners. He proposed repentance and faith to the three thousand hard-hearted sinners, and they did not complain of the terms, but gladly complied with them. When they asked what they should do, "he said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." "Then they gladly received his word, and were baptized." The terms of the gospel are no higher now than they were then; and then sinners could easily and gladly comply with them. Why can they not as easily and gladly comply with them now as then? It is always easier to comply with the terms of the gospel, than to complain of them and reject them. "The way of transgressors is hard." Sinners act against the authority of God, the dictates of their own consciences, and against their own eternal interests, in rejecting and refusing to comply with the terms of the gospel; and this must be hard. But there is a pleasure in becoming reconciled to God, in repenting, and believing the gospel. The three thousand found it so, and ten thousand since have found it so. Why stand ye halting between two opinions? Your duty is plain and pressing. If you have sinned, repent; if the gospel be true, receive it gladly; if your souls are precious, secure their salvation; if you are uncertain of to-morrow, to-day hear the voice of mercy, and harden not your hearts.

7. It appears from the conduct of those who gladly embraced the gospel, that they as gladly professed Christ before men. So it is expressly said, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." When sinners sincerely repent of the dishonor they have done to God and to religion, and of the injury they have done both to the friends and enemies of God, they sincerely desire to do honor to God and religion, and repair the injuries they have done to their fellow-men. And to make a public profession of religion, is one way to answer these desirable and important purposes. A long delay of this duty looks like the want of sincerity; but a ready and prompt performance of it, has a direct tendency to fasten conviction upon delaying sinners. What if all who have professed religion in this place had neglected it, would not the church have become extinct? And if that had become extinct, what would have been the state of religion here now? Would the forms of it have been preserved? It is of unspeakably more importance for all true converts to make a profession, than they and others are ready to realize. What great public design can be successfully carried on without a union? and what union can be permanent without a bond? Christian union, as well as any other, requires a bond, and all Christians ought to take the bond of a solemn covenant upon them, to maintain their union, and to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Their hearts are too deceitful to be trusted without a guard. They need the watch, and care, and encouragement, and assistance of one another. "Two are better than one;—and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

This subject now calls upon all who have neglected to repent, to repent without further delay. They have delayed too long, and strengthened their hearts and hands against God, and treasured up wrath against the day of wrath, and may be almost ripe for ruin. They are under a sentence of condemnation, and they know not how soon that sentence may be executed, except they repent. This delayed duty must be done, or they will be lost forever. They are now in the hand of their holy and righteous Sovereign, and must submit, or die.

This subject likewise calls upon all true penitents, who have neglected to profess Christ and be baptized, immediately to name the name of Christ, and if they have not been baptized, to be baptized, and give up themselves to God in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten, nor broken. These are duties not to be neglected even in this busy season. "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

SERMON XVII.

GOD IS TO BE REGARDED IN THE SUCCESSION OF THE SEASONS.

"NEITHER say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest."—Jeremiah, v. 24.

THOUGH men are unmindful of God, yet he is not unmindful of them; and though men disregard the operations of his hand, yet he regards the operation of their hearts. He keeps his eye fixed upon them, to discover their views and feelings under his smiles, as well as under his frowns; and when they appear to be insensible of either, he views their stupidity with peculiar displeasure. His people of old were very prone to disregard the displays of himself in his providence. Of this he complains in several of the preceding verses. "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes and see not; which have ears and hear not: fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted, and gone." It follows, "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season; he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest." Here God claims to be the governor of the natural world, and blames his ancient people for not properly discerning and regarding the hand of his providence in the regular succession of the seasons, which visibly display the glorious perfections of his nature. And he ascribes their unreasonable conduct, not to a want of capacity, but to a want of dis-

position, to see and acknowledge his constant and supreme agency in the government of this material world. We may, therefore, justly conclude,

That God is highly displeased with those who disregard the displays of himself, in bringing about the appointed weeks of harvest. I shall show,

I. That God does bring about the weeks of harvest according to appointment.

II. That he gives peculiar displays of himself in bringing about this event.

III. That he is highly displeased with those who disregard such displays of himself.

I. Let us consider that God brings about the season of harvest according to appointment. It requires the same hand to govern the world, which first brought it into existence. The earth is hung upon nothing but the almighty hand of the Creator. He never has given, and never could give it an independent existence. He upholds and governs it by a constant exertion of his power. Should he withdraw from it his supporting influence a single moment, it would instantly cease to exist; or should he cease to move it, all motion would immediately stop, and everything become torpid and inactive. This demonstrably proves that he governs the sun, moon, and stars, and all the material creation. He causes the sun to rise and set, the clouds to gather and distil in dews, in showers, and in storms, and the seasons to follow one another in a regular succession. This regular succession of the seasons is necessary to bring about the weeks of harvest. All the seasons of the year have their influence in producing the various fruits of harvest. The cold, and frosts, and snows of winter, the genial warmth of spring, and the fervid heat of summer, are all necessary to bring every species of grain to maturity. God therefore governs all the elements as well as all the seasons in reference to harvest, which crowns the year. And now it is easy to see, that the regular succession of the seasons must be owing to a divine appointment. When we see any of our fellow-men act in a uniform, regular manner, from time to time, we naturally conclude that their regularity of action is owing to a previous, fixed design. And we naturally expect that they will continue the same mode of conduct, unless some unforeseen and unexpected cause incline, or compel them to vary their course. According to analogy, we have a much stronger reason to suppose that God brings about the regular season of harvest agreeably to a fixed and permanent law of his own operations. He has, so far as we know, for nearly six thousand years,

brought about this important season, without failing in a single instance. Though he has varied in respect to the plenty or scarcity of the fruits of harvest, yet he has never varied in respect to the annual succession of the season. And now we as naturally expect the continuance of harvest from year to year as we do the rising and setting of the sun from day to day. But we are not left to the bare conjecture of reason upon this subject. God himself has told us that he has actually appointed the weeks of harvest, and will never fail to execute his purpose. "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." The promise of God, that he will cause the succession of the seasons affords, us absolute certainty, that they will continue their course till the final consummation of all things. Though there may be ten thousand changes and revolutions in the moral world, yet the divine promise renders it certain that the natural world shall move on in its regular course. Though the imagination of man's heart be evil from his youth, and though the human race should become tenfold more corrupt than they ever have been, and should more justly deserve to be swept from the earth than any former generation, yet God has promised that the regular succession of the seasons shall not cease. And he has assured us, that whatever other judgments he may inflict upon the nations for their ingratitude, disobedience, and rebellion, he will not deny them the benefits of the seasons, but will continue to exert his power in causing the regular succession of day and night, winter and summer, seed-time and harvest, until this lower world shall cease to exist. I proceed to show,

II. That God gives peculiar displays of himself in thus bringing about the appointed season of harvest. And,

1. He hereby gives an incontestable evidence of his eternal existence to all mankind. It is impossible to account for the regular succession of the seasons, and the annual return of harvest, without acknowledging the existence of some self-existent, all-wise, and all-powerful Being. Admitting the world were eternal, and all matter self-existent, still we could not account for its regular motion and action, without a wise and powerful agent to arrange, direct, and move all material bodies. What God does, therefore, in causing the sun to rise, the rain to fall, the seas to ebb and flow, the grass to spring up, and the grain to ripen in harvest, demonstrates that there is some invisible, intelligent, and powerful agent, who orders and directs all these things. Accordingly, the apostle argues the existence of God from his governing the seasons; and charges idolaters

with criminal blindness for not seeing this visible evidence. When they were about to offer sacrifices to him and Barnabas, they cried out, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." This argument silenced the pagans, and diverted them from their idolatrous purpose. And the Jews in Jeremiah's day acknowledged before God this evidence of his divinity and superiority to all false gods. "Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou he, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things." God manifests his eternal power and Godhead in every spire of grass, in every kernel of grain, and in every tree, and plant, and fruit that grows, as clearly as he does in the heavens and the earth. The regular succession of the seasons and of the weeks of harvest, gives as clear and visible evidence of the existence of the Deity as the angels saw when he created the world. They saw nothing but the effects of the divine operation; and we see the same in the revolution of every day, and especially in the revolution of every season of the year.

2. God not only manifests his existence, but displays his perfections, in governing the seasons in reference to harvest. In bringing about this fruitful and joyful season, he governs the heat and the cold, the winds, the clouds, and the showers; and in ordering these, he acts as an absolute sovereign, without the least control. He reserves the times and the seasons in his own power. There is nothing more out of the reach of human agency and influence, than the seasons of the year, and the productions of the earth. These are constantly and absolutely in the hand of God, who governs them according to his own laws and appointment. He determines when each season of the year shall begin, and how it shall begin; whether favorably or unfavorably to the fruits of the earth. He determines whether there shall be extreme heat or extreme cold, or a more mild and moderate temperature of the air, in summer and winter; and whether seed-time and harvest shall be extremely wet or extremely dry, or whether both shall be such as to produce a plenty or a scarcity of sustenance for man and beast. And as he determines, so it must be; for none but he can gov-

ern the elements, and bring the fruits of the earth to their proper growth and maturity. We can neither stand before his heat or his cold; we can neither raise a cloud, nor direct its course, nor cause it to distil in gentle showers on one place or another. We can only stand and see the sovereignty of God, in causing it to rain, or not to rain; in causing the sun to shine, or not to shine; and in causing the fruits of the earth to flourish, or to wither or die. Thus God every day and every season gives us a clear, and often a very sensible manifestation of his sovereignty; and teaches us that our lives, and health, and everything respecting our temporal concerns, are entirely at his disposal. Again,

He reads us an instructive lesson on his wisdom, in the regulation of the seasons, and their various productions. He displays his wise purposes in dividing the year into four such various and beautiful seasons. This diversity of seasons is found necessary to produce a vast variety of very useful and delicious fruits. Some of these cannot be produced without one season, some without another, and some without the influence of all the seasons united. Indeed, the production of ten thousand things extremely useful for food, and raiment, and medicine, results from the variety of the seasons. God displays his wisdom in appointing a uniformity, as well as a variety, of seasons in different parts of the world. In some parts of the earth there is constant heat, in others constant cold, in others a variation of heat and cold. In all these different places, different things are produced; so that the world is vastly enriched with good things, by means of heat and cold, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. The wisdom of God is beautifully displayed in the different productions of the different seasons of the year. When we look at the trees of the forest, the flowers of the field, and the vegetables that grow out of the earth, we discover the superlative wisdom of Him who has given them so much uniformity amidst such a vast variety. The construction of a plant, or a flower, or a blade of wheat, surpasses the art of man, and displays a wisdom of contrivance which no human understanding can comprehend. How manifold are the works of God! In wisdom he has made, and in wisdom he governs them all. And this wisdom shines with peculiar lustre in the time of harvest, when the earth puts on her beautiful garments.

In this season of the year, God also displays his goodness to all the world. He opens his hand, and satisfies the desires of every living thing. The fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, and the meanest creatures on earth, feast upon the bounties of

providence. The earth appears to be full of the goodness of the Lord; and every rational and irrational creature enjoys in a greater or less degree the happy influence of it. But it is the prerogative of mankind to trace all the various streams of goodness to the fountain head, and discover the heart and hand of God in all these acts of kindness and beneficence. While God is pouring into their bosoms all the blessings of harvest, he displays the riches of his goodness towards them. Though they have forfeited the world, yet he continues them in the possession of it. "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." In harvest, therefore, when the earth is pouring forth its riches in the largest profusion, God gives a striking display of his care and kindness towards the children of men, in preserving and governing the whole world for their benefit.

It may be further observed, that God displays not only his sovereignty, his wisdom, and his goodness, but likewise his faithfulness, in governing the seasons, and bringing about the appointed weeks of harvest. He divided time into days and nights, months and years, from the beginning of the world. And he early promised that summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, should not cease while the earth remains. And, according to his appointment and promise, he has uniformly acted ever since they were made. Every harvest exhibits an increasing evidence of his faithfulness to his word, and of his immutability in carrying into effect his purpose of preserving the regular succession of the seasons to the end of time. And this faithfulness confirms the immutability of all his other purposes and promises respecting the moral state of the world, and the final condition of mankind. Accordingly, our Saviour, in one of his parables, makes use of harvest as a lively emblem of the divine conduct in preparing the moral world for the final consummation of all things. "The harvest is the end of the world." The natural world was made for the moral; and times and seasons were appointed to prepare mankind for their final destination. Every day, every month, every successive season, and every season of harvest, displays the faithfulness of God to fulfill his promises, and execute his threatenings to mankind. As he is causing days, and weeks, and years to pass on as fast as possible; so he is preparing all things as fast as possible for the last great Day, when he will settle all the affairs of the universe, and fix all intelligent creatures in their final and unalterable state of endless happiness, or endless misery. I now proceed to show,

III. That God is highly displeased with those, who disre-

gard the displays of his being and perfections in governing the seasons in reference to harvest. He certainly has much reason to complain of all, who do not say in their heart, let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives the former and latter rain, who brings the fruits of the earth to maturity, and who reserves to us the weeks of harvest, according to his promise and appointment.

For, in the first place, this disregard to the being and perfections of God, in the time of harvest, manifests great stupidity. God has given men eyes, and ears, and all their bodily senses and mental powers, for the noble pupose of seeing, admiring, and adoring the perfections of his nature, exhibited before them in his conduct towards them. It must be owing to nothing but inexcusable stupidity in such rational creatures, if they disregard his power, wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness, from day to day, and especially in time of harvest. He complains of his ancient people for their stupidity, because they had eyes, and ears, and a capacity to discern and acknowledge his heart and hand in the dispensations of providence. He represents them as more stupid than the animal creation. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." He says again by Jeremiah, "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord;" or the smiles or frowns of his providence. Such stupidity in a time of harvest, when all nature is displaying the goodness and faithfulness of God, must be highly displeasing to the Author of all their mercies.

In the next place, those who disregard the displays which God makes of himself in the time of harvest, express great depravity of heart; which is very offensive to him. It was for this, that he condemned his people, in the text. "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, who giveth rain, both the former and the latter in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of harvest." The stupidity of mankind in regard to God, is always owing to their love and attention to other objects. It is because they love the world and the things of the world, that they forget and forsake God, the Creator and Benefactor of the world. They wander and love to wander from God, because they love the creature more than the Creator, and his gifts more than the giver. This

is acting a very ungrateful, disobedient, and criminal part. If stupidity did not arise from forgetfulness, and forgetfulness from depravity, men could not be justly blamed for their stupid disregard of God, from whom they receive every good and perfect gift. But God knows, though they may not know and feel it, that it is wholly owing to the depravity of their hearts, that they do not realize and fulfill their obligations of gratitude to Him, who gives them all things richly to enjoy in the time of harvest. And, whenever they awake from their stupidity, they see abundant reason why God should condemn them, and why they should condemn themselves for their base ingratitude.

Especially when they consider, in the last place, that while they disregard the displays of divine goodness, in the time of harvest, they disregard their own good, and expose themselves to future and eternal ruin. By abusing God, they abuse themselves, and treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. If the riches of divine goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, do not lead men to gratitude and repentance, they will lead them to endless perdition. The man, who laid up goods for many years, and resolved to abuse divine favors, was suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy. Upon another God poured out the vials of his wrath, for abusing the blessings of his providence. God determines, that, if his goodness does not soften the hearts of men, it shall harden them; and if it does not save them, it shall destroy them. God solemnly warns those, who are inattentive and blind to the displays of his glory in the dispensations of providence, of the dire effects of his future and eternal displeasure. "Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." And at the same time he graciously declares, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God is highly displeased with all who disregard the displays of himself in ordering the times and seasons of the year; then he is certainly highly displeased with a vast number of the human race. He must be highly displeased with all the heathen nations, who comprise much the largest number of mankind. They are universally sunk down into a state of gross ignorance of God, the Creator and Governor of the world. "Professing themselves to be wise, they have become fools: and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image

made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Though they have eyes, and ears, and every rational power and faculty, yet they live entirely ignorant of the only living and true God, who gives them incontestable evidence of his being and perfections, and fills their hearts with food and gladness. Their moral ignorance, which arises from the moral blindness of their hearts, is altogether inexcusable, and highly displeasing to God. There are some among the civilized and gospelized nations, who with the Bible in their hands, and the works of creation before their eyes, say there is no God; that the world has always existed, and will always exist; that all events take place according to the necessary and immutable laws of nature, without the superintendency of any invisible, almighty, intelligent agent. These are such as the Prophet calls foolish people, and without understanding; who have eyes and see not; who have ears and hear not; and who fear not the Lord, nor regard the operations of his hand, in setting bounds to the ocean, in giving the former and latter rain, and in reserving the appointed weeks of harvest. There is no doubt but God is highly displeased with those, who, contrary to the light of reason and scripture, deny, disbelieve, and disregard, the visible and striking displays of himself in the regular succession of day and night, winter and summer, seed-time and harvest. To these classes of mankind may be added another very numerous class, who live without God, and without faith, and without hope in the world. They rise up, go out, and come in; see all that is visible in the works of creation and providence, and yet God is not in all their thoughts, nor acknowledged in all their ways. Thus the great mass of mankind all over the world are living in a state of ignorance, stupidity, and ingratitude, while God is continually displaying his power, his wisdom, and his goodness, in governing all things for their benefit, and pouring down upon them the blessings of his providence in innumerable and copious streams. It is not strange we are told, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God." But he saw they were all gone out of the way; there is no fear of God before their eyes, nor gratitude in their hearts. Nor is it strange that God has revealed his wrath from heaven against such a stupid, ungodly, and ungrateful world.

2. If God is highly displeased with those, who disregard the manifestations of his glory in the revolutions of the seasons; then the time of harvest affords them no excuse for neglecting religion. Though mankind have no excuse for neglecting re-

ligion in any season of the year, yet they are extremely apt to imagine that they have some excuse for neglecting it in the appointed weeks of harvest. They are ready to reason with themselves in this plausible manner. "The ripening and ripened fruits of the earth call upon us to exercise constant care, and to be diligent, early and late, in our secular callings, so that we have no time to spare for the duties of religion and devotion. We are commanded to labor six days in the week, and do all our work. This command we mean to obey; and we hope that our strict and constant obedience to this command may be some excuse for totally neglecting, or occasionally omitting, other less pressing and necessary duties."

This inward language of an evil heart of unbelief is perfectly absurd, unreasonable, and unscriptural. God requires all men to give him the supreme affection of their hearts, and bring all their secular interests and concerns into complete subordination to his glory, and the interests of his kingdom. Christ required men to "seek *first* the kingdom of God." And "he spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." There is no secular business which men may lawfully pursue, that can justify or excuse them, in any season of the year, for neglecting to read the Bible, or for neglecting to call upon God, or for neglecting to attend public worship. All other duties, which come in competition with these, must give way, unless in cases of necessity and mercy. Men have no right to pursue their worldly business so constantly and vigorously, as to unfit them for daily devotion, or the duties of the sanctuary. And they have no right to love the world and the things of the world, with that selfish affection which will necessarily exclude from the heart supreme love to God. This is emphatically true in the time of harvest, when God is making the most amiable, beautiful, and captivating displays of himself before their eyes, and calling for their filial fear and gratitude. Take the scenes, the cares and the labors of harvest all together; and it is so far from affording the least excuse for the neglect of religion, that it greatly aggravates the criminality of such neglect. It is the best time to gather fruit unto eternal life. Love to God and man and every pious affection may be carried into all the labors of the field, and all the common concerns of life. The proper discharge of religious duties has no tendency to obstruct men in their secular pursuits; but, on the other hand, it directly tends to inspire them with resolution and zeal, and a well-founded hope of success. Sinners are aggravatedly guilty in neglecting the care of their souls in the time of harvest, and waiting for a more convenient

season; and in laboring for the meat that perisheth, instead of that which endureth to eternal life. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Or is it wise or excusable in Christians to suffer the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches to check their faith and love, destroy their peace and hope, and render them unfruitful?

3. If God makes peculiar displays of himself in the time of harvest; then it is the most trying season to the hearts of men, and shows whether they are blind or deaf, or how far they are blind or deaf. It is light that tries men's eyes, and it is sound that tries men's ears. If men cannot see in the clearest light, it shows that they are totally blind, and cannot see at all. Or if men cannot hear the plainest and loudest voice, it shows that they are entirely deaf, and cannot hear at all. It is in harvest that God exhibits himself in the clearest light, and speaks with the plainest voice. If those who have eyes cannot see him in harvest, it shows that they are totally blind, and cannot see at all. If those who have ears cannot hear his voice in harvest, they are entirely deaf, and cannot hear at all. Or, if some who have eyes can scarcely see the light of the glory of God in the time of harvest, it shows that their sight is poor; or, if they can hardly hear his voice, it shows that their hearing is bad.

Harvest-time, therefore, tries all men, whether they are saints or sinners, and whether they are growing or declining saints. Those who cannot see the glory of God, and hear his voice, are sinners, who are totally blind and deaf, or totally dead in trespasses and sins. Harvest affords them no religious joy or gratitude. They do not say in their hearts, Let us now fear and praise the Lord; but then they most sensibly say to him, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." But growing Christians have eyes to see the glory of God displayed in the fruits of the earth, and bounties of providence, and they "are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." They hear and obey his voice, which calls upon them to "praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Their hearts are filled with the joy of harvest. The case is sensibly different in respect to declining Christians. They see but little, hear but little, and enjoy but little of God, though he is passing before them in the most visible, and calling upon them in the most endearing manner. Their sight is poor, and their hearing is bad.

How few, alas, properly employ this precious season to try their own character, and discover their own spiritual state!

The essential difference between saints and sinners lies not in their external appearance and conduct, but in their internal views and exercises. Though they appear more alike, yet they feel less alike in harvest than in any other season of the year. For while sinners are laboring for themselves, saints are laboring for God. While sinners rejoice in themselves, saints rejoice in God. While sinners regard the gifts of Providence more than the Giver, saints regard the Giver more than the gifts. While sinners feel less and less obligations to love and trust in God, the more and greater favors he bestows upon them; saints feel greater and greater obligations to love God, and confide in his goodness and faithfulness, the more and richer blessings he bestows upon them. These are widely and essentially different effects, which harvest excites in the breasts of saints and sinners; by which both may and ought to judge whether their hearts are right or wrong in the sight of God, and of course, whether they are his friends or enemies, and preparing for future blessedness, or endless misery.

4. If it be altogether criminal and inexcusable for those who have eyes and ears, understandings and consciences, to overlook and disregard the goodness of God in causing the constant and regular succession of the seasons; then sinners increase in guilt extremely fast, and to a great degree. They constantly shut their eyes, and stop their ears, lest "they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted." They know that if they do but open their eyes, they must see God; and if they do but open their ears, they must hear his voice, and receive a painful conviction of the corruption of their hearts, the criminality of their conduct, and their indispensable and immediate duty to repent and believe the gospel, and renounce the world and the things of the world, in which they place all their present hopes and happiness. They therefore resolve to pursue their present course, and risk the awful consequences. And by pursuing their present course, they disregard God every day and in everything. By overlooking his hand in every blessing they enjoy, they abuse every blessing they enjoy. The blessings which God bestows upon them from day to day, from season to season, from year to year, and for a series of years, are more than can be reckoned up, and greater than can be described. The consequence is plain and irresistible, that they increase in guilt as fast as days, and seasons, and years can roll; and to as great a degree as their circumstances and capacities can admit. They do evil things, and as many evil things as it is morally possible for them to do. God has bestowed as

many and as great favors upon them in childhood, in youth, in manhood, and in every past period of their lives, as it was morally possible for him to bestow; and they have perverted and abused them all. Have they not reason to say as other sinners have said and felt, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not?" Hence,

5. This world is exactly suited to save, or destroy the souls of men. God is constantly exhibiting himself to their eyes, to their ears, to their consciences, and to their hearts. If they only open their eyes and their ears, all the works of God, and all the dispensations of his providence in every season of the year, are directly suited to make good men grow in knowledge and grace. And they do actually produce this desirable effect. In this light, Christ represents the influence of divine cultivations upon the children of the kingdom. He says, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth the fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." And the Psalmist says, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon—they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." They see and enjoy God in the blessings of harvest; in the blessings of providence, and in all the blessings of the gospel. They say in their hearts, let us fear the Lord our God, under all the tokens of his favor. All the manifestations of God serve to enliven and invigorate their graces, and ripen them for the kingdom of glory. But the world is suited to produce directly opposite effects in the hearts of sinners. All the beauties of nature, all the productions of the earth, all the varieties in the seasons, and all the profusions of divine bounties, directly tend to captivate their hearts, stupify their consciences, and allure them along in the smooth and broad road to destruction. It is just such a world as they love, as they wish to enjoy, and never to leave. The more God does for them, and the louder he speaks to them, the blinder and the deafer they grow. The more winters, and summers, and harvests, he gives them, and the longer he waits upon them to be gracious, the more they cling to the world, and the more averse they are to comply with the terms of salvation. All that God does to cause Christians to grow in grace and activity, serves to make sinners grow more stupid, thoughtless, and obstinate in sin, and to ripen them faster and faster to be cut down as cumberers of the ground.

It follows,

6. That it is easy for sinners to destroy themselves, notwithstanding all human means and efforts to prevent it. It is only for them to persist in shutting their eyes to all the manifestations of God before them, and to stop their ears against the voice of God and man, and they will certainly maintain their stupidity, and stupidity alone will effectually destroy them. Stupidity is continually growing easier and easier. It is easier for the old than for the young to be stupid. The longer sinners resist truth, despise reproof, and violate the dictates of reason and conscience, the easier it is to maintain their habits of sin and sinful stupidity. This is the representation of the prophet, who demands: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil?"

But though sinners maintain their stupidity, yet they cannot obstruct or retard the wheels of time. The seasons will roll on according to God's appointment, and put a speedy end to their sinful lives. There is no room to doubt that the interval between this and the next harvest, will prove fatal to some, who are in God's view ripe to be cut down, and gathered into his garner, or blown away as chaff, and burnt up with unquenchable fire.

SERMON XVIII.

CHANGES AND REVOLUTIONS, WISELY ADAPTED TO OUR PRESENT STATE.

"The fashion of this world passeth away."—1 Cor. vii. 31.

This we perceive to be true, every day, and everywhere. There is not a single object with which we are connected, or with which we are acquainted, that is, for a single moment, at perfect rest. All things are in motion. The world is perpetually changing.

To illustrate the truth and reason of this, is the object of the ensuing discourse.

The world here may be taken in its utmost latitude, as comprehending the material, animal, and moral world.

1. The material world is perpetually changing. The earth, the sea, the moon and the stars, are constantly moving, and some of them with a velocity beyond conception. The motions of these material bodies, however, would be of little consequence, did not their motions change the face of nature, and produce the interesting revolutions of day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. A succession of these seasons, we find, is essential to our living, and answering the ends of living, in this world. Accordingly God has promised an uninterrupted succession of these to the end of time.

2. The animal world is perpetually changing. The power of motion is a property of all the animal tribes. And they are generally in actual motion. Some exchange elements, and others exchange climates. They all gradually rise, come to maturity, and return to the earth, from whence they came. Particular tribes of animals, at particular places, increase, diminish, and become totally extinct. This has always been observed in newly-settled countries. We have observed and regretted, the removal and extinction of some very valuable

animals, in this part of the world. And doubtless, we shall have reason to regret the loss of others, in time to come. For the animal world is perpetually changing.

3. The moral world is perpetually changing. Under this phrase, we comprise individuals, families, societies, nations, kingdoms, and empires, together with the various orders, ranks, and conditions of men. All these belong to the moral world, and require a distinct consideration.

There has been a constant succession of rising and falling empires, from Nimrod, to Lewis the Sixteenth. This succession has sometimes been more, and sometimes less rapid. Some nations have sprung from a smaller, and some from a larger stock. Some have made a slower, and some a swifter progress in arts and in arms. Some have flourished a longer, and some a shorter time. Some have been slow, others rapid in rising and in falling. Some have gained a larger, and some a smaller dominion. Some have risen higher, and fallen lower than others. Some have left marks of their existence, and monuments of their greatness. Others have sunk into total oblivion. In many instances, the succession has been absolute, so that the marks of succession are obliterated. The fashion of this world is so changed, that the places of ancient kings, the bounds of ancient empires, and the walls of ancient cities, are totally lost. Where was the garden of Eden? Where was the tower of Babel? Where were the walls of Babylon and Nineveh? What were the arts of Egypt and Chaldea? What were the arms and dress, of the Greeks and Romans? The revolution of ages and empires has concealed these things from our knowledge. We cannot ascertain the origin of the present nations of the earth, or determine from which branch of Noah's family they descended. Such changes have passed over the kingdoms and nations of the world in times past; and such are still passing over them. The political world is still in convulsions. Nations are struggling with each other, for the power of dominion. One nation is falling into the hands of another. Large kingdoms are crumbling to pieces. Great and ancient nations are in the last stages of declension, and upon the verge of ruin. And similar changes will, in all probability, pass over younger and smaller empires, which are rising to flourish and to fall.

Kingdoms comprise smaller societies and communities, which are subject to change, not only by national revolutions, but by fortunate and unfortunate events peculiar to themselves. Societies civil, religious, and literary, are subject to continual changes. No charters, compacts, or agreements, are sufficient

to prevent animosities, contentions, divisions and dissolutions. They rise and flourish for a while, and then decline, and crumble into ruin. It is the fate of all societies to neglect, to abuse, to forfeit, and to lose their privileges. Hence the continual revolutions in human societies. Some are rising, and others are falling. Some are starting up anew, and others verging to oblivion.

Communities of all kinds are composed of families. These are changing from generation to generation. One family increases till it becomes extremely numerous. Another diminishes till it becomes extinct. One family is distinguished for health, another for beauty. One for riches, another for honor. One for genius, another for piety. And these distinctions they often support till the third and fourth generation. Then they commonly lose their family character, and sink into obscurity, while others run through the same revolutions.

Individuals are still more liable to perpetual changes of body and of mind. These changes, however, are so natural, so common, and so gradual, that they are hardly thought to be changes, and many pass through them, without observing the real alterations and ravages of time. But there are other changes more sudden, more unexpected, and more shocking to individuals. These are visible, and compel observation.

Men are perpetually changing circumstances. The strong become weak, and the weak strong. The healthy become sickly, and the sickly become healthy. The rich become poor, and the poor become rich. Such changes of circumstances are taking place every day, and everywhere. The man who is smiling in the morning, is mourning at night. The man who began the year with high hopes, ends it in disappointment and despair. The man who goes out full, returns empty. The man who never saw an evil day, at once feels all the calamities of life. The glory and fashion of every person is passing away.

Men are constantly changing ranks, which involves a change of company, and a change of circumstances. The man who had lived in obscurity, is called into places of distinction and observation. This creates new views, new hopes, new fears, and new prospects. Presently he is thrown from his seat, and mixes with the unnoticed again. In every age and part of the world, the distinction and change of ranks prevail. The same mutability awaits the highest, as well as the lowest in station. The Mogul loses his head. The Emperor relinquishes his empire for a monastery. The Pope loses his triple crown. The Prince exchanges his palace for a prison. The General, instead

of dying by the sword of the enemy, falls by the hand of justice. The Judge, instead of giving, receives the sentence of death. The man who had been loaded with honors, is loaded with chains and reproaches.

Men are continually changing characters, as well as ranks. It has been found by long observation, that very few men have strength and integrity of mind sufficient to endure the change of rank without apparent variation in character. If a man loses his place, loses his interest, or loses his character, however unjustly, he is exceedingly apt to change his disposition and conduct, and suffer an internal as well as external loss of character. Some change for the better, and some for the worse. The vicious become virtuous, and the virtuous become vicious. The idle become industrious, and the industrious idle. The prayerless become prayerful, and the prayerful become prayerless. The visible saint becomes the visible sinner, and the visible sinner becomes the visible saint. And in some instances, real sinners become real saints, and pass from death unto life. Such changes in character are common in our world. How few have supported a uniform character through life? How many who began with fair and promising characters, have lived to disappoint both themselves and their friends? Among elevated characters, these changes have been not only more apparent, but more frequent. Elevated characters meet with more difficulties and trials, but have no more virtue to surmount them. And this will account for the great and frequent changes in the character of great men. No wonder that a patriot should become a tyrant, that a humble priest should become a haughty pope, or that the saviour of a country should become its destroyer. For men of all classes are perpetually changing their characters.

As men are perpetually changing their characters, so they are as constantly changing their customs and manners. There has been a constant succession of these from the beginning of the world to this day. The old world were perpetually changing their customs and manners, till they became so corrupt, that God swept them from the earth, in order to purge it from their corruptions. After the flood, they were more plain and simple in their habits of life, but as they increased in numbers, they introduced new modes of dress, of living, of diversion, and of religion. Succeeding ages copied their example. How did the Greeks and Romans change from time to time, in all their habits of living and dress, as well as fighting and governing. The European nations are as fickle as the wind, in their modes and forms. And the changes in customs and manners

have never been greater, or more rapid, in any age or part of the world, than in America, especially within these few years past. We do not appear, or dress, or live, or act like the same people who first settled this country.

Men are likewise perpetually changing their opinions. Principles change with times. Outward circumstances have a powerful influence over the internal views of the mind. And all other changes have a tendency to introduce changes in the opinions of mankind. Accordingly we find, they have always been as subject to change of sentiments, as to any other change. Every revolution of government has always produced a revolution not only in civil, but religious opinions. Every age, and almost every year brings with it new systems of politics, new systems of philosophy, and new systems of divinity. The revolution in England, the revolution in America, and the revolution in France, have been followed with great changes in the opinions of men, upon some of the most important subjects of human inquiry and investigation.

Again, men are constantly changing pursuits. New scenes open new prospects, and new prospects lead men to new pursuits. The industrious farmer leaves his laborious and honest calling, for the more promising, and more disappointing business of trade. The physician turns politician. The divine turns attorney. The merchant turns speculator. And many are seeking places and pensions.

I have only to add, that men are changing affections. Different nations are continually forming new treaties of amity, alliance, and defence. But they are scarcely linked together in these bonds of affection, before some jarring interests, or some designing men, create jealousies, disputes, and bloodshed. Smaller societies are subject to the same alienation of affections. And very few who come upon the stage of life as friends, leave it with the same character and feelings. Nothing is subject to greater inconstancy than friendship. A faithful man in point of friendship, who can find? All the changes passing over men, have a tendency to change their affections. The rising forget their falling friends. The rich forget their poor friends. The high forget their low friends. The designing make a prey of their honest friends. The young forget their old friends. And those who are friends for interest, for the same reason, become inveterate enemies. Thus "the fashion of the world passeth away."

Let us now consider the reason of this; or why God has subjected this world to such perpetual changes. This is the Lord's doing, and ascribed to divine agency in the scriptures. David says, "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from

the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another." Daniel says, "And he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings; he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding." And Job says, "With him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are his. He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death. He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again." He who made the world and all things therein, might have given them a more firm and stable condition. And we have reason to think, the time is coming when the world will put on a more steady and uniform appearance. Why then has God hitherto caused so many changes and revolutions to pass over the world? This question no one will expect should be fully answered, because many reasons of this, may yet be concealed in the mind of God, who has reserved the times and seasons in his own power. Some important reasons, however, may be easily suggested.

1. One is, to make the world know that he governs it. God makes use of so many secondary, visible causes, in the government of the world, that mankind are apt to fix their whole attention upon these, and overlook the first and supreme Cause. To awaken their attention, therefore, to his own invisible and almighty hand, he orders such changes to pass over them, as they are obliged to ascribe to his invisible agency. This he tells us, was the reason of the changes he brought upon Pharaoh and his kingdom. "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten me honor upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen." For the same reason, he subjected Nebuchadnezzar and his empire to an astonishing revolution. "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to

thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee: and they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." More than fifty times God gives this reason for great revolutions and changes, "*that ye may know that I am the* LORD." And this is always one reason, why he subjects the world to such great and constant revolutions and convulsions.

2. Another reason is, to display his perfections before the eyes of men. In great changes and revolutions, God gives great discoveries of his perfections. It is of importance that men should not only know that God governs the world, but that he governs it according to perfect rectitude. God, therefore, means to display his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his justice, and his sovereignty in the government of the world. Great changes display great power, great wisdom, great goodness, and great justice. But especially do great changes display the sovereignty of God to the greatest advantage. Witness the old world,—Babel—Sodom—Egypt—raising up the Jews—and dispersing them.

3. God subjects the world to perpetual changes, to draw forth the talent, power, and abilities of men. Great changes make great men. This has always been manifest in all the revolutions of time. When great things are to be done, great men rise up to do them. A thousand distinguished characters would have lived and died in obscurity, had not the changes and revolutions of the world called for their great exertions. The revolution by the flood called forth the great abilities and exertions of Noah. The revolutions in Egypt called forth the talents of Joseph, of Moses, of Aaron, and of Joshua. The revolutions of Israel called forth the abilities of David and Solomon. The captivity in Babylon raised up Daniel. The revolutions of Empire raised up Cyrus, Alexander, and Cæsar. The revolutions and changes in England raised up Cromwell and Pitt. The revolution in America called forth the abilities of Washington, and a whole train of patriots, generals, and statesmen.

4. God subjects the world to great and constant changes, to discover the corruptions of the human heart. All changes are trials; and great changes are great trials. And they always tend to lay open the great depravity of human nature. For they give great opportunity for men to act out their hearts. This disclosed the heart of Pharaoh. This disclosed the hearts

of the Israelites. God meant to try and prove them, to see what was in their hearts. And the changes they passed through answered this purpose. Revolutions always have this effect.

5. God causes sudden changes, to restrain the corruptions and evil designs of men. This appears from the history of Babel. So it was in Egypt. Pharaoh laid a plan to subject the Israelites to perpetual bondage. But a great and sudden revolution blasted his designs. This was the case at the Revolution in England. The accession of William and Mary saved this state and country from impending ruin. So it was at the late Revolution. A scheme was formed for the oppression of Americans. And this has been the case in respect to individuals. Some sudden change has dashed the designs of those who were meditating evil. It is in vain for man to appoint, for God can disappoint.

6. God causes many changes to pass over individuals to try and refine their graces. This appears from the history of Abraham, of Job, of the primitive Christians, and from the history of saints at this day.

7. One great and important end God has in view in all the great changes of the world, is to promote the good of the Church. For this purpose he caused the changes in Egypt and in Canaan. For this end he raised up and destroyed the great empires of Babylon, of Persia, of Greece, and of Rome. For this purpose he destroyed the temple and city of Jerusalem. And for this purpose he is still shaking the kingdoms and nations of the earth. And he will continue to overturn, and to overturn, and to overturn, till the kingdom of the Prince of peace shall be established through the earth.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. *God* subjects the world to perpetual changes. It is better for it, in the present state of human nature, to be in a changing, than in a settled condition. The mutability of the world has been a subject of complaint in all ages. Men have imagined that a steady, uniform state of human affairs would be much more desirable, than a state of perpetual changes and revolutions. Many think a state of universal peace and rest would be more favorable to knowledge, virtue, and happiness in the world. But this is doubtless a great mistake. For God has ordered it otherwise, for many weighty reasons, which are plain and obvious. The mistake of mankind upon this subject, seems to arise from overlooking the present state of human

nature. It is the character of fallen man to be given to indolence and vice. Very savage and very refined nations show that men are naturally indolent. Very savage nations are indolent. They eat and sleep. Very refined nations do the same. The reason is, that such nations are not obliged to be active. China has never been torn by external revolutions and convulsions. And the Chinese have made little progress in knowledge, in virtue, or happiness. The savages are generally at rest, and make no discoveries in the arts, or progress in virtue. Hence it is evident, that great and frequent changes are necessary to rouse the attention, and draw forth the latent powers and abilities of men in the pursuit of knowledge, of virtue, and of happiness. Though revolutions and changes have made dreadful havoc in the world; though they have destroyed libraries, demolished works of art, and buried the learning and improvements of nations and kingdoms in oblivion, yet there is reason to believe, there has been, and is now, more virtue, more happiness, and more knowledge in the world, than if no wars had taken place, and no revolutions had passed over nations and kingdoms, but all the world had been united as one large empire. The men after the flood built Babel, on purpose to prevent the dispersion of mankind, and those changes and revolutions which they foresaw would probably result from a dispersed and divided state of the world. But they misjudged. So God thought, and therefore confounded their designs. The hearts of men must be greatly altered before they can enjoy a fixed and peaceable state. And therefore till the millennium takes place, revolutions will be necessary and beneficial. This is the scriptural representation of the matter. When men shall have a disposition to attend to the works of the Lord, and his great designs, and when they shall generally approve of his designs, then they will see and feel sufficient motives to employ all their time, and exert all their abilities in the service of God.

2. Are changes and revolutions beneficial to the world? Hence we learn that it is a favor to live when great changes and revolutions take place. It is a benefit to have objects to rouse the attention, and excite the exertions of the mind. That generation of Israel who, from twenty years old, spent their lives in a changing and tumultuous state, were the best generation of that nation. It is written, "Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase." They were highly favored, to be called to see the revolutions in Egypt, in the wilderness,

and in Canaan. So it has been a great privilege to us, to live in this age of the world, and be spectators of the great revolutions which have taken place before our eyes. New scenes have been constantly opening. We have had better opportunities, than any before us, to be knowing, virtuous, and happy. And nothing but the corruption of our hearts has prevented great progress in these. We have, however, reason to believe, that we have made more progress in all these, than if no revolutions had taken place. We are still in a state favorable to improvement. The world is in convulsions. The heart of God and the heart of man are clearly displayed.

3. Is the world perpetually changing? Then we learn the absolute importance of religion, in order to happiness in this changing world. We have nothing else to depend upon. All things else are changing and passing away. We cannot depend upon health; upon riches; upon honors; upon friends; or upon ourselves. God alone is unchangeable, and therefore the only proper rest to a rational and immortal mind. All who rest here are safe. Storms may rise; empires may fall; and all things change, but they are safe. Those who neglect this, are daily exposed to lose all.

4. Is the world perpetually changing? Then we learn that all the blessings we enjoy, are greatly enhanced by the channel of great revolutions and tribulations, through which they come. These revolutions enhanced the blessings of Noah—of the Jews—and of the Gentiles, when the Jews were broken off. And all changes and revolutions which have passed over the world, enhance our blessings. For, these are, in a sense, the fruit of all the changes that ever have taken place. But especially they are the fruit of the revolutions in Europe and America. A revolution in Europe planted us here. And a revolution here has established us. We live upon the dead; wear their clothing; possess their houses; improve their farms; read their books, and are taught by their lives. The world has been laboring; fighting; studying; living; and dying for us. What a precious price has been paid for our liberties; for our learning; for our peace; for our religion. What blessings do we enjoy which have not been mentioned? If our interest remains, it is a wonder. If our friends are alive, it is a wonder. If our prospects are bettering, it is a wonder.

5. What great reason have we as a people, and as individuals, to praise God. This duty must be performed, in order to glorify God, or enjoy him. Let all be exhorted to perform it, both the old and the young. Especially let saints praise the great Author of changes and revolutions, "for his wonderful works to the children of men," as David did in the one hundred and seventh Psalm.

SERMON XIX.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD NOT STRAITENED.

"O THOU that art named, The house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?"—Micah, ii. 7.

MICAH prophesied in the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Jotham was a pious prince, but he did not exert himself to promote the cause of religion, which rather declined, than flourished during his reign. And after his death, his son Ahaz proved a vile idolater, and employed all his royal power and influence to corrupt his people, and draw them away from the worship of the true God. This was a time of darkness and distress to all the real friends of God, while the enemies of religion were triumphing, and bidding defiance to the solemn warnings and admonitions of the prophets. They said to them that prophesied, "prophesy not." They wished and endeavored to silence those who brought the messages of God to them, when they reproved and threatened them with the marks of the divine displeasure, for their stupidity, disobedience, and rebellion against him, whom they had once acknowledged to be their God. Hence the prophet addresses them under the appellation of the seed of Jacob. 'You descended from that pious ancestor, and have enjoyed great and distinguished privileges in consequence of your relation to him. And now dare you doubt, whether the Spirit of the Lord be straitened?' The text naturally suggests this general observation:

It betrays great stupidity to imagine that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened.

I. I shall show that the Spirit of God is not straitened in his operation or influence upon the minds of men: And

II. Show that it betrays great stupidity, to imagine it is.

I. I am to show that the Spirit of God is not straitened in his operations and influence upon the minds of men. Here I would observe,

1. The divine Spirit is not straitened in regard to the variety of his operations. He may exert restraining influence, or awakening influence, or convincing influence, or sanctifying influence. He has a free and uncontrolled access to the human mind. Though we know not the mode of the Spirit's operation upon the minds of free, voluntary agents, yet we know that the same Almighty Spirit, who gave them understanding, and all their intellectual and moral powers, is able to operate upon them just as he pleases, and produce just such effects as seems good to him. If he only intends to restrain men from action, as he did David from destroying Nabal, he can do it. Or if he intends to awaken them from their stupidity, to set their sins in order before them, and cause them to see the fatal consequences of rebelling against God, he can do it. Or if he means to fasten conviction upon their consciences, and make them feel that they deserve to be cast off forever, he can set the law home upon their consciences, and reduce them to a state of self-condemnation. Or if he means to make them the vessels of mercy, he can shed abroad the love of God in their hearts, or take away the stony heart, and give them a heart of flesh. He can mould them into the divine image, and make them partakers of the divine nature. And when he has done all these things, he can work in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure, or carry on the good work which he has begun in their hearts. The Spirit of God is never straitened in his common, special, or supernatural operations. He exerts, with equal ease, every kind of divine influence upon the minds of men.

2. The Spirit of God is not straitened in regard to the extent of his power and influence. He is omnipresent, and capable of acting to the uttermost parts of the universe. This David realized as well as believed. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" The divine Spirit pervades and surrounds the whole universe with his presence. And hence he is able to operate upon any of mankind, or all of mankind, without overlooking a single individual, let him be where he will. Nor has the atonement of Christ restrained the extent of his influence, as some imagine. Christ did not make atonement merely for the elect, nor did he purchase the influences of the Spirit for them alone, as some have taught. But he made an atonement for all mankind, and opened the way for the divine Spirit to operate on whom he pleases. There was no occasion for purchasing the Spirit, for he is as ready and willing to operate upon the minds of men, as the Father was to send the Son, or the Son to come and suffer for sinners. So that the Spirit of

God is not in the least straitened or confined in his operations upon mankind, wherever they may be placed on the face of the earth.

3. The divine Spirit is not straitened as to the times of his operations. He could have operated as visibly, powerfully, and irresistibly in the days of Jotham, and Ahaz, as he did in the time of Hezekiah. In his reign there was a great and general revival of religion. And ever since Hezekiah's time, there have been certain seasons of the extraordinary effusions of divine influence, by which the cause of religion has been greatly revived and extended. There was such a season in the days of Seth, when men were uncommonly excited to call upon the name of the Lord. There were many such seasons from Joshua to John the Baptist. There was such a season on the day of Pentecost. And after that, in different places, where the apostles preached. Nor have there been wanting many such seasons in Europe and America within several of the last centuries, as well as in still later times. Though the times do really as well as apparently alter; and some seasons are more, and others less favorable to divine influence; yet the Spirit is never straitened by any changes which take place in the natural or moral world. He can operate in times of adversity, or of prosperity; when his judgments are abroad in the earth, or when the world is at ease and quiet, and all engaged in their worldly pursuits and amusements. He can operate in the summer or the winter; in the most busy as well as in the most leisure seasons of the year. We never know beforehand, when he will begin his special and powerful operations, in this part or the other part of the Christian world, or in this or the other state, town, parish or family. He reserves the seasons of his operations in his own power, and chooses his own times, to come down like rain on the earth.

4. The divine Spirit is not straitened as to the places of his operations. He often begins and carries on a work of grace, where it was least expected and desired, and leaves other places to mourn and lament his absence. He often goes where Satan's seat is; where sin and iniquity are abounding; where the enemies of religion are all united in opposition to it, and are vainly imagining that they shall gain a complete and final victory over it. Where did Satan ever appear to reign more powerfully and triumphantly, than at Jerusalem, where he had influenced the whole city against the Son of God, and caused them to crucify the Lord of glory? But while they were in the midst of their triumph, the divine Spirit struck fear into every soul, (Acts, ii. 43,) and wrought a saving change in the hearts of thousands. And since that time, he has gone into the larg-

est cities, as well as into the smallest towns and villages, and displayed his sovereign power and grace. He is now operating in places, where a few months ago, there was not the least prospect of his appearance, but everything seemed to forbid the hope, that he ever would visit them, by his gracious influence. Though religion seems to be nearly or quite extinguished in many places in our land, yet the Spirit of God can go there as well as anywhere else, and form vessels of mercy, and raise up many sons to glory.

5. The Spirit of God is not straitened in respect to the subjects of his operations. He can bow the heart of the self-righteous moralist, of the dissipated prodigal, of the erroneous heretic, of the hardened infidel, and of the most stout-hearted sinner. The rich are not above, nor the poor below his sovereign influence. He can take the young or the aged, the learned or unlearned; those in the meridian, or those in the decline of life. He arrested Manasseh after he had spread idolatry, misery and destruction through his kingdom. He met Saul of Tarsus, while he was breathing out slaughter and destruction against the harmless followers of Christ. He met Matthew at the receipt of custom, and Peter and John as they were mending their nets. He took a judge from the bench at Athens, and numbers from Cæsar's household at Rome. There is no external or internal opposition that men can make, which can restrain the divine Spirit in his operations upon their minds. Though they may resist the Holy Ghost, yet they cannot restrain or overcome his powerful influence. He can operate as easily upon one person as upon another, let their character, or condition, or circumstances, or determinations and pursuits be what they may. Of this, there have been a vast many instances in the Christian world. None are below or above his influence.

6. The divine Spirit is not straitened in respect to the duration of his influence. He is the eternal, as well as immutable and omnipresent Spirit. He can exert his resistless influence over men all their days. He can exert his awakening influence as long as he pleases. And sometimes he does keep persons in perpetual fear and distress, for months, and years, and even through life. Upon others he exerts his convincing influence, from time to time, and keeps their consciences awake and tender as long as they live. And when he has once subdued the heart, he can continue his sanctifying influences, till the subjects of his grace are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Indeed, wherever he has exerted his sanctifying influence, there he dwells, and comforts, and sup-

ports, and strengthens the hearts of believers. Nor will he ever forsake them through the boundless ages of eternity. Though in this life, saints may resist and grieve the Holy Spirit, by which they are sealed to the day of redemption; yet he will not finally depart from them, but graciously and powerfully draw them to himself, and subdue their remaining corruptions. In a word, he will operate upon the minds of both sinners and saints, as long as he pleases, and produce just such views, and feelings, and exercises as he sees best. He knows no restraint from the desires, designs, deserts, or opposition of mankind. He operated upon the men of the old world, till they were destroyed; and upon the rebellious Jews, before and after Christ's day; and he is now probably operating more or less, upon all men where the gospel is enjoyed. And he will continue to operate, by his common or special influence to the end of time, and through the interminable ages of eternity. I may add,

7. The Holy Spirit is not straitened as to the means of his operating upon the minds of men. He always employs means, except in his supernatural operations. In working miracles, he never employed any means, or made use of the instrumentality of created agency. Though men were said to work miracles, yet they had no proper agency in producing miraculous effects. These were solely produced by the almighty power of the Spirit of God. But in restraining, awakening, and convincing sinners, and in sanctifying believers, he always employs means. But even here he is not straitened. He has all men and means in his power, and can employ just such as he pleases. He sometimes makes use of the reading or hearing of the word. He sometimes makes use of private warnings, counsels and advice. He sometimes makes use of religious conversation, and sometimes even of profane. He sometimes makes use of uncommon favors, or of extraordinary frowns. He sometimes makes use of sickness or of bereavements. He sometimes makes use of the works of nature, or the works of art, or the ways of providence, or the dispensations of grace. It is no uncommon thing for the awakening of one to be the means of awakening another; or the conversion of one to be the means of the conversion of another; or the quickening of one saint to be the means of the quickening of another. The ways and means which the Holy Spirit employs in operating upon the minds of men, are extremely numerous and various, and sometimes very mysterious. He has the whole creation at his command, and can make the winds and waves, earthquakes and pestilences, wicked men and devils, the instruments of pre-

paring the human race for their final destination. And he is, undoubtedly, employing all his creatures and works, in forming the characters of men, though they are very insensible of his powerful and sovereign influence. Can we then reasonably suppose that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened? or that his influence can be restrained? This leads me,

II. To show, the stupidity and absurdity of this supposition. The expostulation in the text plainly implies, that God views mankind as stupid enough to imagine that the divine Spirit can be straitened, and controlled in his operations. "O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" 'You call yourselves the seed of Jacob; but did Jacob say to the prophets, Prophesy not, or disbelieve the operations of the divine Spirit, when he prayed for his powerful influence upon the heart of his brother, who was coming with an armed power to destroy him? Are you following his example, in attempting to restrain the influences of the divine Spirit? Or are you not acting in direct opposition to your own experience? Have you not found my word quick and powerful, yielding light, conviction, and comfort under the influence of the Holy Spirit?' This seems to be the import of the expostulation of the prophet. But would there have been any propriety or pertinency in it, if those who called themselves the seed of Jacob, had not doubted, or called in question the uncontrollable power and influence of the divine Spirit? Indeed, it appears from various passages of the Old Testament, that the people of God did often imagine, that his Spirit was straitened. In Jeremiah's day, they said, "There is no hope." In Ezekiel's day they said, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost." It was to meet and reprove such thoughts as these, that the prophet declared, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear." Now since the divine Spirit strives more or less with sinners by his restraining, awakening, and convincing influences, it argues stupidity in them to entertain the thought, that he cannot operate upon them without control or restraint. Especially is it so, when they often see others of their character thrown into the gall of bitterness, by his powerful operation upon their hearts. But it is much more absurd for those who are named "the house of Jacob," and call themselves Christians, to imagine that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened in regard to his operations upon any of mankind. This must arise from no other cause, than an evil heart of unbelief; or from their being sunk down into a stupid, worldly

spirit. In such seasons they are liable to overlook all they have seen, and heard, and felt of the divine influence. But this betrays most criminal stupidity and absurdity.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Is the Spirit of the Lord not straitened? Hence we may be assured that he will completely fulfill all the promises he has made respecting the spread of the gospel, and the enlargement of Christ's kingdom. He has promised that Christ shall reign till all his enemies are made his footstool,—that all people and tongues shall serve him—that peace, and holiness, and happiness shall universally prevail, and that there shall be none to hurt or destroy. Now if the Spirit be not straitened, he can remove all the obstacles in the minds of men, against the universal spread of truth and holiness—all that lie in the minds of the seed of Jacob—of Mahometans—of Pagans—of kings —of philosophers—of religious teachers.

2. If the Spirit of the Lord be not straitened, then it is extreme folly and wickedness to oppose his operations. This, mankind have always been disposed to do. The Jews always resisted the Holy Ghost. The Gentiles have done the same, and are still found fighting against God. But this is absurd and criminal. The Spirit can, and does operate upon them, as well as others, and will defeat their designs.

3. If the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, there is ground and encouragement to pray for the revival of religion in the darkest seasons. He has often appeared in such seasons.

4. If the Spirit of God is not straitened, then wherever he has begun a good work he can carry it on—in any place—in any family—in any soul.

SERMON XX.

THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD UPON THE WICKED IN THIS LIFE INDICATIVE OF THEIR FUTURE RETRIBUTION.

"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."—2 Peter, ii. 4--9.

Mankind naturally desire to be happy, both in this life and that which is to come. Their eyes and ears and hearts are always open to those false teachers, who employ all their art and sophistry to persuade them that they shall escape future punishment, and enjoy complete and endless happiness. The apostle Peter found many in his day, who manifested a strong disposition to embrace the pleasing doctrine of such artful deceivers, whose character, and conduct, and pernicious sentiments, he reprobates in the strongest terms. Having mentioned the true prophets, in the last verse of the first chapter of his second epistle, he proceeds, in the ensuing chapter, to say, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves, swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Now to prove that God would certainly destroy such deceivers and their followers, he argues in the following conclusive manner: "For if God spared not the *angels* that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the

eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an *ensample* unto those that after should live ungodly;—the Lord knoweth how to reserve the *unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.*" This mode of reasoning from what God has done to what he will do, is plain and obvious to every capacity. Since God has actually inflicted temporal punishment upon impenitent sinners, who can help drawing the same inference from it, which the apostle has drawn, that God will reserve them unto the day of judgment, and then inflict an eternal punishment upon them. If we believe the Bible, we must believe that God has punished the fallen angels; that he has punished the inhabitants of the old world; that he has punished the men of Sodom and Gomorrah; and that he has, from age to age, revealed his wrath from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. And if we believe these plain, stubborn facts, we must believe the apostle's declaration, that they presage the future and eternal punishment of the finally impenitent. Accordingly, I propose in this discourse, to illustrate the apostle's argument:

That since God punishes the ungodly in this life; he will, if they remain ungodly, punish them eternally in the life to come.

The force and conclusiveness of this argument must appear to all, who will attentively and candidly attend to the following observations:

1. God's punishing sinners in this life shows that they deserve to be punished. Sin and guilt are inseparably connected. It is the nature of sin to deserve punishment. If sin did not deserve punishment, God would never punish men for it. It is wrong, in the nature of things, for God to punish an innocent creature, who has done nothing to deserve punishment. If sinners were not verily guilty in the sight of God, he would not be displeased with them, nor inflict the least pain or punishment upon them as a mark of his righteous displeasure. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Punishment is his strange work, which nothing can induce him to do, but the guilt and ill-desert of sin. So that his actually punishing sinners in this life affords infallible evidence that they *deserve* to be punished for their disaffection and disobedience to him. But if they deserve to be punished for these sins in this life, they will deserve to be punished for them in the life to come. For punishment has no tendency to remove or even diminish the guilt and ill-desert of sin. Does the punishment inflicted upon the transgressor of human laws, take away

or lessen their guilt or ill-desert? Are they not as really guilty and ill-deserving after they have been punished, as they were before? And does the punishment which God inflicts upon sinners, have the least tendency to remove or diminish their guilt and ill-desert? Will any punishment they receive in this life render them less deserving of future and eternal punishment? Has the punishment which the fallen angels have endured for nearly six thousand years, taken away their guilt, or rendered them less deserving of future and eternal punishment? Has the punishment, which the inhabitants of the old world, and the men of Sodom and Gomorrah have suffered for more than four thousand years, destroyed or diminished their guilt, or rendered them less deserving of the vengeance of eternal fire? Did the punishment which God inflicted upon Pharaoh and his subjects, diminish their guilt, or render them less deserving of future and eternal misery? We cannot conceive that punishment in any case should remove the desert of punishment. Those who have once deserved punishment, will forever deserve punishment. But we know that the ungodly deserve punishment, because God has actually punished them in this life; which is an infallible evidence that they deserve to be punished *forever*. This being true, it serves to illustrate the apostle's argument. For, if God's punishing sinners in this world rendered them less deserving of future punishment, then his punishing them in this world would be an argument against his punishing them eternally after death. But if his punishing them in this life demonstrates that they deserve to be punished *forever*, then this very desert of eternal punishment, is a good reason, why they should expect to be punished *forever*.

2. God's actually punishing the ungodly in this world, shows that it is consistent with his goodness to punish them *eternally* in the world to come. God's actually punishing sinners, demonstrates that it is as consistent with his goodness to punish them, as with his justice; for we cannot suppose that he ever does an act of justice which is not consistent with his goodness. God never exercises one perfection of his nature in opposition to another. He never exercises his goodness in opposition to his justice, and he never exercises his justice in opposition to his goodness. God's actually punishing sinners, therefore, as fully proves that it is consistent with his goodness to punish them, as with his justice. If his dooming the rebel angels to endless punishment, proves that he was just in doing it, it equally proves that such an act of justice was consistent with his goodness. If his drowning the old world, and burning

Sodom and Gomorrah, proves that he was just in doing it; it equally proves that such an act of justice was consistent with his goodness. Or if his punishing sinners, in any instance, proves that he is just in punishing them, it equally proves that it is consistent with his goodness to punish them. If it be consistent with divine justice to punish sinners according to their desert; then it is equally consistent with divine goodness to punish them according to their desert. And if it be consistent with divine justice to punish sinners as long as they deserve to be punished; then it is consistent with divine goodness, to punish them as long as they deserve to be punished. And if sinners deserve to be punished *forever;* then it is consistent with both divine justice and divine goodness to punish them *forever.* We have no ground to suppose, that it is any less consistent with the goodness of God, to punish sinners as long and as much as they deserve to be punished, than it is consistent with his justice. And since we know from God's actually punishing sinners in this life, that it is consistent with both his justice and goodness to punish them in this life, according to their deserts; we may justly and infallibly conclude, that it will be equally consistent with both his justice and goodness, to punish them according to their deserts in the life to come. It is impossible to see why it should be any more inconsistent with the goodness of God, to punish sinners according to their desert, in another world, than in this. And since God does actually punish sinners in this world, because they deserve it, who will presume to say, it is not consistent with his goodness to punish them as he does punish them? And who that acknowledges, that it is consistent with his goodness to punish them *here*, will presume to say, it is inconsistent with his goodness to punish them *hereafter* according to their deserts? It is strange, therefore, that any who acknowledge the justice of God in punishing sinners according to their desert, should presume to deny that it is consistent with his goodness, to punish them according to their desert, either in this life, or in that which is to come.

3. God's actually punishing sinners in this world, shows that he may have as good reasons for punishing them in another world, as in this. God does not always punish sinners when he sees that they deserve to be punished, but only when he sees good reasons for punishing them. The world of the ungodly long deserved to be punished before God saw best to sweep them from the earth with the besom of destruction. Pharaoh deserved to be destroyed long before God destroyed him. The seven nations of Canaan deserved to be cut off, long

before God cut them off. Indeed, God is not obliged, in point of justice, to punish sinners at all, in this probationary state. And he never does punish them merely because it is just to punish them; but only when he sees good reasons to punish them, or some good ends to be answered by it. In all instances in which God has actually punished sinners in this world, we know that he has seen good reasons for punishing them. Now if God has seen good reasons for punishing sinners in this world, we may justly conclude that he may see as good and better reasons for punishing them in another world. One reason why God punishes sinners in this world, is to display his wrath towards them; and another reason is to display his mercy towards the subjects of his grace. And he may see both these reasons for punishing sinners in a future state. So the apostle concludes in the ninth chapter of Romans. "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" The apostle here has particular reference to Pharaoh, whom God destroyed on purpose to display his wrath towards him, and the glory of his mercy towards his chosen people. And cannot God answer these two important ends, by punishing Pharaoh and all other impenitent sinners to all eternity? Many seem to imagine, that God can see no good reason for punishing sinners forever; but it is easy to conceive, that the same reasons, which induced him to punish sinners for a time, should induce him to punish them *forever*. Why should he be more unwilling to show his wrath and make his power known in punishing the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, in another world, than in this? Or why should he be more unwilling to make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, in the world to come, than in the present world? But if we only suppose that God can see as good reasons for punishing the ungodly in a future state, as he actually sees for punishing them in this world; then we must suppose, that he will certainly punish them in another world, as long as he can display his wrath towards them, and his mercy towards the vessels of mercy.

4. God's actually punishing sinners in this world, shows that it is consistent with the universal atonement of Christ, to punish them according to their desert, forever. It must be granted that Christ made atonement for the sins of the whole world, and tasted death for every man. But his atonement did not alter the nature and ill-desert of sin, nor release the sinner

from suffering that eternal death which the divine law threatens to every transgressor. It only rendered it consistent for God to forgive and save penitent believers of the gospel. Though Christ suffered death in the room of all mankind; yet he did not suffer that punishment which they had deserved, and which God had threatened to inflict upon them. Sinners deserve to be punished according to the threatening of the divine law, as much as if Christ had never made atonement for them; and of consequence, God may, consistently with the atonement, make all the impenitent and unbelieving completely and forever miserable. And this appears not only from the nature of the atonement, but from the fact, that God does actually punish sinners in this life, notwithstanding Christ died for them: and we know that he has constantly been punishing mankind, from age to age, notwithstanding Christ has died for them. Now if Christ's atonement does not render it inconsistent for God to punish sinners in this life, how can it render it inconsistent for him to punish them in the life to come? God's actually punishing sinners in this life, is instead of a thousand arguments, to prove that it is consistent with the atonement, to punish them according to their desert, forever. The atonement of Christ, either *has* or *has not*, removed the guilt of sinners. If it has removed their guilt, then it is inconsistent for God to inflict the least punishment upon them in this world; but if it has not removed their guilt, then it is not inconsistent for God to punish them, both in this world and the next. And since God's conduct proves, that it is consistent with the atonement to punish them in this life, it equally proves, that it is consistent to punish them in the life to come. It is too absurd for any man to say, that it is inconsistent with the atonement of Christ, for God to punish sinners in this world; but it is no less absurd to say, that it is inconsistent for God to punish them in a future and eternal world. Every argument that can be drawn from the atonement of Christ, against the future and eternal punishment of sinners, stands completely refuted by the ten thousand instances of God's punishing them in this world.

5. God's punishing sinners in this world, shows that it is consistent with his desire for their salvation, to punish them forever. God is a being of perfect benevolence; which disposes him to *desire* the happiness, and regret the misery of his creatures, simply considered. He loves happiness for its own nature, and hates misery for its own nature. He takes pleasure in bestowing happiness, but not in inflicting pain. Accordingly, he solemnly declares, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have

no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." God sincerely desires that sinners should be happy both in time and eternity, simply considered; but not all things considered. His benevolent desires are under the direction and influence of his unerring wisdom, which sees great and good ends to be answered, by actually punishing those, who deserve to be punished. This we know to be true, from God's conduct in ten thousand instances before our eyes. Though God does not afflict willingly, yet he does afflict; though he does not punish willingly, yet he does punish. Though God strove with the old world, by the influences of his spirit, to prevent their awful doom; yet he finally destroyed them. Though God invites sinners to accept of mercy; yet when they disregard and reject his kind and gracious offers, he cuts them down as cumberers of the ground. God's conduct in punishing sinners in this life, demonstrates, that it is consistent with his desires for their present happiness, to punish them in this present state. And if it be consistent with his desires for the happiness of sinners in this world, to punish them in this world; then it must be equally consistent with his desires for their eternal happiness, to make them, for wise and good ends, eternally miserable. Since we all know from plain and stubborn facts, that it is really consistent with God's perfect benevolence, to punish sinners in this life; we must know, that it is really consistent with his perfect benevolence, to punish them forever, in the life to come. It is just as consistent with divine goodness to inflict an *eternal*, as a *temporal* punishment, upon sinners, when they equally deserve both.

6. God's punishing sinners in this world, shows that he not only may, but certainly will punish the finally impenitent forever in a future state. Accordingly the apostle Peter says, "Making them," that is the inhabitants of the old world, and the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, "*ensamples* unto those that after should live ungodly." And the apostle Jude declares, Sodom and Gomorrah "are set forth *for an example*, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." It appears from these express declarations, that one end God had in view in destroying the old world, and the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, was to prove the *certainty* of his actually inflicting upon the finally impenitent, the vengeance of eternal fire. God has frequently threatened to cast the wicked into hell with the fallen angels. But actions speak louder than words; and for this reason, among others, God actually punishes sinners in this world, to put it beyond the possibility of doubt, that he certainly will punish the finally impenitent eternally. God is not obliged in

point of justice, to punish any sinner in this world; but he does punish both good and bad men in this world, to give assurance that he will punish the finally impenitent forever. So the apostle Peter plainly intimates in the fourth chapter of his first epistle. "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Since the apostle repeatedly asserts, that it is one design, God had in view, in punishing men in this world, to give them the highest possible evidence, that he will certainly cause them to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, if they remain finally impenitent; then it is just as certain, that God will eternally punish those that do not eventually obey the gospel, as that he *has* punished the fallen angels, or the inhabitants of the old world, or the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, or any other men since that day. In a word, we have an ocular evidence of the future and eternal punishment of the wicked.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God's punishing sinners in this world, infallibly proves, that he will punish the finally impenitent forever in the next; then it is easy for every one to see, that the doctrine of Universal Salvation is absolutely false and absurd. There are many minor, and some great religious errors, that are quite plausible, and not easy for people in general to discover. But the doctrine of Universal Salvation, is so plainly and visibly false, that every person is capable of seeing its falsehood and absurdity. It is contrary, not only to the whole current of scripture, but to the whole course of Providence. It stands condemned by all the threatenings of the law, and of the gospel; and by the most solemn and awful dispensations of Providence from the beginning of the world to this day. It is difficult to conceive, how God could say anything plainer, than he has said, or do anything better calculated than he has done, to convince every person in the world, that he will eternally punish every impenitent and incorrigible sinner. Though there have been some in the Christian world for more than fourteen hundred years, who have taught the pleasing doctrine of Universal Salvation; yet they have generally been very unsuccessful in making proselytes. Though thousands and millions have embraced the error of Arianism, the error of Socinianism, and the error of Arminianism; yet only a few individuals until very recently have

ever embraced the error of Universalism. This the advocates of Universalism have frankly acknowledged. But it cannot be accounted for, upon any other supposition, than that of its plain and palpable absurdity. God has expressly told us, that he will treat the finally impenitent in another world, as he has actually treated them in this. If this be true, then every person can clearly see and know, that all men will not escape the wrath to come; but some will forever suffer with the fallen angels, whom God has actually cast down to hell. If the apostle's argument, which has been illustrated, be just, it puts an argument into every person's mouth, to refute a Universalist.

2. If God's punishing men in this world, proves that he will punish the finally impenitent forever in a future state; then the doctrine of Universal Salvation is not only false and absurd, but extremely dangerous. It has a direct and powerful tendency to harden the hearts and stupify the consciences of sinners, who are walking in the broad road to ruin. If they once give a listening ear to this fatal delusion, they become deaf to the voice of reason, to the voice of the gospel, and to the terror of the law. They are prepared to avoid, to oppose, to reject all means of light and conviction, and rush on the thick bosses of God's buckler, and trifle with all the motives and objects of the eternal world. Like the scoffers of old, they feel and say, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die," and be happy. This is the fatal effect of a full belief of Universal Salvation. But when the doctrine is not fully believed, and only begets a hope, that it may be true, that all men will be saved, it has a secret and powerful tendency to lull sinners into carnal ease and stupidity respecting their spiritual and eternal interests. And here, at this day, the danger of the doctrine principally lies. Though there is not one solid argument in favor of Universal Salvation; yet there are many plausible and sophistical arguments, that may be thrown out which may create a hope, that it is possibly true. And this hope leads to presumption, and then to despair.

3. If God's punishing sinners in this world, proves that he will punish the impenitent forever in a future state; then those who teach the gross and dangerous error of Universal Salvation, are criminal and inexcusable. They not only, as the apostle says, bring destruction upon themselves, but upon others whom they deceive. Such false teachers are extremely criminal, if they do not believe the doctrine they teach, and there is reason to think this is often the case. And when it is the case, it proves them to be guilty of the most perverse falsehood and deception. But if they do believe it, they are utterly

guilty and inexcusable; for they have no right to believe it, and it is owing to nothing but their love of error, instead of the truth. God has revealed his wrath from heaven, against those who corrupt his word; and the apostle says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." To hate and reject the plain truths of the gospel, is infinitely criminal. Such persons, instead of warning the wicked from their way, aid and encourage them to continue in their way to everlasting ruin. And though they may perish, yet their blood will God require at their teacher's and deceiver's hands.

4. If God, by punishing sinners in this world, has made it certain, that the doctrine of Universal Salvation is absolutely false, and extremely dangerous to the souls of men; then it is kind in ministers to preach against, and refute it, and guard their hearers against it. The preachers of the doctrine pretend that they do it in kindness. But if it were true, there is no great kindness in preaching it; for all men are equally safe, whether they believe it or not. But if it be false and fatal; then there is kindness in preaching against it, and guarding men against going near those who spread such mortal poison. The prophets did this. Christ did this. The apostles did this. And faithful ministers have done it, and been successful. Error is destined to fall before truth. Let false teachers pass on your right hand and left, and say nothing to them unless they attack you. And then tell them, God has commanded you to avoid them, and absolutely refuse to hear strong delusions, lest you should believe a lie, and be damned.

5. If God has, by punishing men in this life, given the highest possible evidence, that he will forever punish the impenitent and unbelieving; then it is a great mercy, that they now have a space for repentance, and that God is waiting to be gracious. This God might have denied long ago, and may deny soon. Now is the only accepted time. Next year, or the next day may be too late. Let awakened sinners flee immediately from the wrath to come. There will soon be a final and awful separation between the saved and the lost. Are you prepared for the awful event? Have you done all that you ought to have done, and all that you will soon wish you had done, to promote your own salvation, and the salvation of others?

SERMON XXI.

GOD DESIGNS THAT MEN SHALL KNOW THAT HE GOVERNS THE WORLD.

"And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth."—Exodus, viii. 22.

There is no instance of God's conduct more celebrated in scripture, than his delivering his people from the hand of Pharaoh and from the house of bondage. He wrought miracles of mercy and miracles of justice, in order to bring about that great event. And he wrought both for the important purpose of displaying his supremacy and dominion over the world. This God declared to Pharaoh, when he said, "I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth." Lord, is a word which expresses authority, and signifies ruler or governor. To know that God is the Lord in the midst of the earth, is to know that he not only fills the earth with his presence, but also governs it with his almighty and invisible hand. And to make men know this, which they are so unwilling to know, is the constant design of God in the course of his providence.

I. I shall make this appear. And

II. Show why he designs to make them know this truth.

I. I am to show that God designs to make men know that he governs the world. This will appear, if we consider that he declares this to be his great object in his conduct. There is no other reason which he so often assigns for his conduct as this. He gave this reason for the miracles of his goodness to his own people. "To the end thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth." He gave this as the reason of the awful displays of his vengeance upon Pharaoh: "For now I

will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." He gave this as the reason of his conduct towards Nebuchadnezzar: "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." But it is unnecessary to recite all the places in the Old Testament, in which God gives this as the reason of his conduct, "That ye may know that I am the Lord." We find this phrase used in this sense more than fifty times. Such repetitions of the phrase give it a peculiar emphasis, and naturally lead us to conclude, that it is indeed God's great design, in the course of his whole conduct, to make mankind know that he governs the world.

It appears also from the manner of God's governing the world, that his great design is, to make men know that he governs it. He governs it like himself, and not like any other being; which is naturally calculated to make men know that he is indeed the supreme Governor. In every age, he has brought about events which have surprised and astonished the world. And his providence every day displays, more or less, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness. So that whoever are wise and will observe these things, even they may know that God governs the world. His manner of governing the world is truly divine, and displays his divinity to all who will observe it. Here I may observe, in the first place, that God governs in a manner which is contrary to the dictates of human reason. When God had called Abraham from his kindred, and given him not only a title to, but possession of, the land of Canaan, we should have been ready to say, it would have been best to have preserved him and his posterity in the place designed for their national residence. But God saw fit to carry his people into Egypt, to continue them there four hundred years, and finally carried them back, through hosts of enemies and streams of blood, to the place where they were once happily seated. A thousand instances of this nature might be mentioned, in which God orders things contrary to the dictates of reason in short-sighted creatures: and all such instances of the divine conduct,

serve to make men know that the world is governed by a Being who has wisdom superior to their own.

Again, God governs the world in a manner contrary to the expectations of creatures. Men are constantly looking forward and expecting that certain particular events will take place. And very often they imagine they see good grounds for their expectations. They observe previous natural causes, which they conclude will produce the expected effects. They lay their account that the race will be to the swift; the battle to the strong; wealth to the industrious; and honor to men of wisdom and merit. But God, in his conduct, often disappoints such expectations. Every day is a day of disappointment to thousands. Things are constantly taking a new and unexpected turn, and no event is certain until it takes place. Time and chance are perpetually disappointing the most strong and well-founded expectations. No man knows what even a day may bring forth. God governs the world so absolutely, and so contrary to human expectations, that the most careless observer might see his hand in the common course of his providence. Besides,

He governs the world contrary to the desires of men. They wish he would bestow more good, and send less evil. They wish he would prevent some events, and bring others to pass. They wish he would spare some lives, and destroy others. They wish, in a word, that he would consult their desires, in all the dealings of his providence. But he governs all things after the counsel of his own will, and pays no regard to the desires of men, which are inconsistent with his wise and gracious designs.

Thus God crosses the reason, the expectations, and the desires of his creatures, in the course of his conduct, by which he means to make men know, that he is the Lord. I am

II. To show why it is his great design in the course of his conduct, to make men know, that he governs the world. Here I would observe,

1. God means to make men know that he governs, to give them just views of himself. They will never attend to his character, until they realize his governing providence. So long as they view God in heaven, and not in the midst of the earth; so long as they feel that he has no concern in governing themselves, and the world in which they live, they have no disposition to look into his character. They are willing to admit there is a God, who made the world, while they imagine he has renounced the government of it. And they feel little concern whether he is great or good. They desire not the knowl-

edge of him, but choose to cast him out of their thoughts. So Pharaoh felt, while he was ignorant of his governing providence. "And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go. I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go?" There is nothing will awaken men's attention to the divine character, but the divine conduct. When they find that God is really concerned in disposing of them, and others whom they regard, then they feel interested to know his character. Then they are ready to inquire, whether his power is irresistible, his wisdom unerring, his goodness universal, his justice inflexible, and his designs eternal and immutable. His character becomes as weighty as his hand, which dispenses good and evil among his creatures. The moment men find themselves in the hand of God as the clay is in the hand of the potter, they begin to learn the divine character, and this is their chief study day and night; and nothing can divert their minds from the interesting object. They want to know, what will please him, and what will displease him. They want to know whether there is any possibility of frustrating his designs, or of getting out of his hand. His character, and conduct, and designs become more interesting, than the character, the conduct, and the designs of all other beings in the universe. This God knows will be the effect of making men know, that he governs. And for this reason among others, he makes it his great object to give this instruction to men. He would have them know himself, and he accordingly manifests his governing hand, to awaken the attention of stupid, sinful creatures to the character of their great Creator, and absolute Sovereign. This leads me to observe,

2. It is the great object of God in all his conduct, to make men know that he governs, in order to give them just views of their own character. Though men are naturally enemies to God, and to all good; though their hearts are full of evil and totally destitute of every holy and benevolent affection, yet they are very ignorant of their total corruption, and can hardly be persuaded to believe it. Indeed, they will not believe when they are only told of it by the word of God. They call the descriptions of their hearts in question, which they find in the Bible; and will not suffer themselves to believe that they are mortal enemies to their Creator, and to every other being, who stands in the way of their happiness. But when they are made to know that there is a God, and that he absolutely, supremely, and universally governs, they begin to become acquainted with their hearts, and find by most sensible experience that their carnal minds are enmity against God, and will

before God cut them off. Indeed, God is not obliged, in point of justice, to punish sinners at all, in this probationary state. And he never does punish them merely because it is just to punish them; but only when he sees good reasons to punish them, or some good ends to be answered by it. In all instances in which God has actually punished sinners in this world, we know that he has seen good reasons for punishing them. Now if God has seen good reasons for punishing sinners in this world, we may justly conclude that he may see as good and better reasons for punishing them in another world. One reason why God punishes sinners in this world, is to display his wrath towards them; and another reason is to display his mercy towards the subjects of his grace. And he may see both these reasons for punishing sinners in a future state. So the apostle concludes in the ninth chapter of Romans. "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" The apostle here has particular reference to Pharaoh, whom God destroyed on purpose to display his wrath towards him, and the glory of his mercy towards his chosen people. And cannot God answer these two important ends, by punishing Pharaoh and all other impenitent sinners to all eternity? Many seem to imagine, that God can see no good reason for punishing sinners forever; but it is easy to conceive, that the same reasons, which induced him to punish sinners for a time, should induce him to punish them *forever*. Why should he be more unwilling to show his wrath and make his power known in punishing the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, in another world, than in this? Or why should he be more unwilling to make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, in the world to come, than in the present world? But if we only suppose that God can see as good reasons for punishing the ungodly in a future state, as he actually sees for punishing them in this world; then we must suppose, that he will certainly punish them in another world, as long as he can display his wrath towards them, and his mercy towards the vessels of mercy.

4. God's actually punishing sinners in this world, shows that it is consistent with the universal atonement of Christ, to punish them according to their desert, forever. It must be granted that Christ made atonement for the sins of the whole world, and tasted death for every man. But his atonement did not alter the nature and ill-desert of sin, nor release the sinner

from suffering that eternal death which the divine law threatens to every transgressor. It only rendered it consistent for God to forgive and save penitent believers of the gospel. Though Christ suffered death in the room of all mankind; yet he did not suffer that punishment which they had deserved, and which God had threatened to inflict upon them. Sinners deserve to be punished according to the threatening of the divine law, as much as if Christ had never made atonement for them; and of consequence, God may, consistently with the atonement, make all the impenitent and unbelieving completely and forever miserable. And this appears not only from the nature of the atonement, but from the fact, that God does actually punish sinners in this life, notwithstanding Christ died for them: and we know that he has constantly been punishing mankind, from age to age, notwithstanding Christ has died for them. Now if Christ's atonement does not render it inconsistent for God to punish sinners in this life, how can it render it inconsistent for him to punish them in the life to come? God's actually punishing sinners in this life, is instead of a thousand arguments, to prove that it is consistent with the atonement, to punish them according to their desert, forever. The atonement of Christ, either *has* or *has not*, removed the guilt of sinners. If it has removed their guilt, then it is inconsistent for God to inflict the least punishment upon them in this world; but if it has not removed their guilt, then it is not inconsistent for God to punish them, both in this world and the next. And since God's conduct proves, that it is consistent with the atonement to punish them in this life, it equally proves, that it is consistent to punish them in the life to come. It is too absurd for any man to say, that it is inconsistent with the atonement of Christ, for God to punish sinners in this world; but it is no less absurd to say, that it is inconsistent for God to punish them in a future and eternal world. Every argument that can be drawn from the atonement of Christ, against the future and eternal punishment of sinners, stands completely refuted by the ten thousand instances of God's punishing them in this world.

5. God's punishing sinners in this world, shows that it is consistent with his desire for their salvation, to punish them forever. God is a being of perfect benevolence; which disposes him to *desire* the happiness, and regret the misery of his creatures, simply considered. He loves happiness for its own nature, and hates misery for its own nature. He takes pleasure in bestowing happiness, but not in inflicting pain. Accordingly, he solemnly declares, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have

them know that he is the Lord in the midst of the earth; and governs all things after the counsel of his own will.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since it is the great design of God in his conduct to make men know that he governs, it is evident that they are extremely unwilling to know this truth. They are capable of knowing this truth; for it requires nothing but to distinguish the cause from the effect. This they can easily distinguish in ten thousand other cases, in which they desire to make the distinction. But if they are capable of knowing that God governs; then there must be some other great obstruction in the way, which renders it necessary for him to make such great and constant exertions to bring them to the knowledge of it. He makes no unnecessary exertions. He must, therefore, see it necessary to use so many methods as he does to make them know that he governs. And this necessity can arise from nothing but their unwillingness to know that he is the Lord in the midst of the earth. Besides, we find from observation, that men are more unwilling to know that God reigns, than to know anything else concerning him. They are more willing to know that he exists, than to know that he governs the world. They are more willing to know that he possesses all divine perfections, than to know that he governs the kingdoms, and nations, and families of the earth. And they are even more willing to know that he has decreed all events, than to know that he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." An obstinate unwillingness to know that God governs all his creatures and all their actions, by his constant, powerful, and irresistible agency is common to all mankind. This is true of philosophers; as is evident from their opinions on this subject. This also is evident from the opinions of many divines, and from the native character of all mankind. For they have the carnal mind which is enmity against God; and which renders them extremely unwilling to know that they are holden with all their concerns in his holy and sovereign hand.

2. In view of this subject we may see the wisdom and goodness of God, in some of the most dark and extraordinary dispensations of his providence. God has done a great many things in the midst of the earth, which, in the opinion of men, have spread a cloud over his wisdom and goodness, and which have led many to call these in question. But the end proposed will explain them, and discover the wisdom and goodness of all

his conduct. God's placing Adam at the head of his posterity, has been thought to bear hard upon his wisdom and goodness. But if he meant to make them know that he governs the world, he could not have taken a wiser and better method to produce this effect, than to suspend the moral character, and consequently all the concerns of mankind, upon the probationary conduct of the first human being. God's drowning the old world, dispersing mankind at Babel, burning Sodom, his conduct towards the Egyptians, the Israelites and the seven nations of Canaan, were suited to make it known throughout the earth, that he governs the world. The same effect is evident from his humbling the monarch of Babylon, his delaying to bring Christ into the world for so many ages, and the dispersion of the Jews. His conduct in raising, prospering, abasing, and destroying nations, is suited to make men know that he is the Lord in the midst of the earth. And his conduct in peculiar favors and frowns towards individuals answers the same purpose. All such dispensations of providence, as are most contrary to human reason, expectations and designs, display the wisdom and goodness of God, in an evident and affecting manner; since he intends, for most important reasons, to make men know that he governs throughout the earth, and works all things after the counsel of his own will.

3. Since God, for the reasons that have been given, means to make men know that he governs, we see why they live so easy and secure in sin. It is because they do not realize that he reigns. The prophet gives this reason for the conduct of such men as were settled on their lees: "That say in their hearts, the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." And the apostle assigns the same cause of the same effect: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." And all sinners are disposed to feel no fear nor concern respecting God so long as they can hold fast the deceit, that he has not the entire control of themselves and all their interests.

4. It should be the great object of religious instructers to make men know that God reigns. They ought to preach such doctrines, and in such a manner as will answer this purpose. And if they are taught and guided by the word, the Spirit, and the providence of the only living and true God, it will be their chief and constant object, in all their religious instructions, to make men know that the counsel of the Lord shall stand, and that he will do all his pleasure. "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory forever."

SERMON XXII.

SINS WITHOUT LAW DESERVE PUNISHMENT.

"For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law."—Romans, ii. 12.

According to the latest and best computation, nearly two thirds of mankind are now in a state of heathenism, and totally destitute of divine revelation. The character and condition of this large portion of the human race, has never perhaps been clearly and fully explained. Some consider the subject too difficult to admit, and others too unimportant, to require a thorough investigation. It is certainly a difficult subject, but it is as important as it is difficult. It lies at the threshold of Christianity, and is the first thing to be understood, in order to a clear knowledge of the necessity and consistency of the gospel scheme of salvation. The apostle evidently considers it in this light. For he begins this epistle, which contains the most complete system of the Christian religion, by ascertaining the character and condition of the Christian and heathen world. He saw it necessary to prove, that both Jews and Gentiles were all under sin, in order to exhibit the nature, necessity and universality of the atonement of Christ, which is the fundamental and comprehensive doctrine of the gospel. In the first chapter, he draws the character of the heathen, and in this second, he describes their condition. And among other things he says, "As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law." By those without the law, the apostle means the Gentiles, the Greeks, the barbarians, or the whole heathen world, who never had the law which was given to the Jews, and consequently had never broken that law, nor stood condemned by it; nevertheless they had sinned without law, and stood exposed to perish without law. The apostle meant

to prove, and did prove, that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, and stand guilty and justly condemned before God. But the design of this discourse is to show

I. That the heathen are without law.

II. That they sin without law. And

III. That they must perish without law.

I. I am to show that the heathen are without law.

A law is a rule of conduct given by proper authority and sanctioned by precept and penalty. There can be no human, or divine law without the sanction of reward and punishment. The heathen have human laws sanctioned by precept and penalty; but they have no such divine law. The law of God, clothed with divine authority, and sanctioned by precept and penalty, binds all those to whom it is given, but no others. So the apostle asserts: "What things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law." Now if the heathen are under no law, which God has ever given to any of mankind, then they are properly speaking, without law. And if we consult the scripture, we shall find that they are not under any law that God has ever gfven to the children of men. For,

1. They are not under the law given to Adam. That law bound only our first parents. No other persons were forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and no other persons ever transgressed that divine prohibition. I know it has been supposed by many, that the law given to Adam was a covenant of works, and that all his posterity ever since have been born under that covenant. But there is no ground for this supposition. The law or prohibition given to Adam was no covenant, and is never represented in the scripture as extending to, and binding any but Adam and Eve. If it bound any besides those persons, it must bind all their descendants. But if it bound all their posterity, then the heathen were under law, which is contrary to the express declaration in the text, that they are without law. Besides, the apostle tells us in the fifth chapter of this epistle, that there was no law given from Adam to Moses. "For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." Adam sinned against law; but from his day to Moses, mankind sinned without law; that is, without any revealed law, sanctioned by divine authority. From this it appears that the heathen are not now, and never were under the law given to Adam, or any covenant of works.

2. The heathen are not under the law of the Jews. The

law which God gave to them at mount Sinai, was not a law of coalition, but a law of separation. It was calculated for the Jewish nation alone, and intended to bind none but that nation, and those individuals of other nations, who should be incorporated with them. Neither the moral nor ceremonial law extended to the nations round about them. These were all left without law. This the apostle repeatedly asserts in the text and context, in which he sets Jews and Gentiles in direct contrast in respect to law. "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law: for not the hearers of the law are justified before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves." In the beginning of the next chapter he asks and answers an important question upon this subject. "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? much every way; chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." If the oracles of God were confined to the Jews, then the laws of God were confined to them; for the oracles of God contained all his laws. The heathen therefore, who had not the oracles of God, were without law. And further forward in this chapter, the apostle declares, "that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law." By this, he meant to distinguish Jews from Gentiles, and to represent the Jews only as bound by their own law. As the heathen never had, nor heard of the Sinai law, so they were never bound by it. They are as much without law, as if that law had never been given.

3. The heathen are not under the law of faith, or the gospel of Christ. This indeed is designed for all nations, and will bind them as soon as they come to the knowledge of it. Wherever the gospel comes, it requires all men immediately to embrace it. But so long as the heathen are destitute of the knowledge of the precepts and penalties of Christianity, they are not bound by it. The apostle represents the heathen in this very light. "For there is no difference," says he, "between the Jew and Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" By the heathen are to be understood, not all the Gentiles, but only those who

have never had, nor heard of the gospel. And all these are certainly without the law of faith. In a word, since the heathen are altogether ignorant of all the laws which God has ever given to men in any age of the world, they are under no divine law whatever. They are as much without law, as if they did not belong to the race of Adam, and had been shut up in the bowels of the earth, ever since it was created. They have neither seen God at any time, nor heard his voice. God has neither written to them, nor expressly laid a single command upon them. He has neither required any duty of them, nor promised any favor to them, nor denounced any punishment against them. They are all absolutely without law. I proceed to show,

II. That the heathen who are without law, are nevertheless sinners.

This is asserted in the text. "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law." It is here declared that all who are without law are actually sinners, and deserve to die. Again the apostle says, "Until the law, sin was in the world;" that is, all the long space from Adam to the giving of the law at mount Sinai, men were universally sinners. And in the chapter preceding the text, he gives a black catalogue of the sins of the heathen world, who were without law. "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperings, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." Profane history, both ancient and modern, confirms this account of all the heathen nations. But is it not contrary to both scripture and reason, to suppose that men should sin without law? We read, "sin is the transgression of the law;" and that "where no law is, there is no transgression." The meaning of these texts may be easily explained. Sin is a transgression of the law, because the transgression is sin. But though every transgression of the law be sin, yet it does not follow that every sin is a transgression of the law. Those who are under the law always sin when they transgress it; but those who are without law, may sin without transgressing any divine law. It may, however, be thought more difficult to explain the other text, "where no law is, there is no transgression." But the plain

and obvious meaning of this is, that where there is no law there is no transgression of law; though there may be sin, by some other way than by transgressing law. And to make it appear that the heathen may sin without transgressing any divine command, I would observe,

1. That they may be under moral obligation to do right, without law. Moral obligation is founded in the nature of things, and is prior to and independent of all written or verbal obligations. No law can make that right which is wrong in the nature of things, nor that wrong which is right in the nature of things. It is right in the nature of things, that men who are moral beings, should love one another; and wrong in its own nature, that that they should hate one another. It is right in the nature of things that the heathen, who are moral beings, should love one another, and wrong in the nature of things, that they should feel and express a contrary, malevolent spirit. Hence they are under moral obligation to do what is right, and to refrain from what is wrong in all cases. This obligation does not depend upon their knowing God, or knowing his laws; nor upon their knowing his existence. If there were no God, the heathen and all the rest of mankind would be under moral obligation to love one another, and to express their love in a proper manner. As it does not depend upon the will, or law, or existence of God, whether two and two shall be equal to four, so it does not depend upon the will, or law, or existence of God, whether men shall be obliged to love one another as themselves. This is an immutable duty, as the other is an immutable truth; and they are both founded in the nature of things. Those, therefore, who are without law, are under moral obligation to do right, as well as those who are under law; and this their moral obligation will bind them in all cases, in all places, and in all times, as long as they remain moral agents.

2. The heathen may know their moral obligation to do right, without law. If moral obligation does not depend upon law for its existence, then the knowledge of its existence does not depend upon law. If the heathen are bound without law, then they may know that they are bound, without law. Their moral obligation is founded in the fitness of things, and they are endued with a moral discernment to discover that fitness. Their moral sense enables them to discover what is right and what is wrong in the nature of things. This moral sense is what is called conscience, which is a faculty that tells all men their duty, and makes them feel their obligation to do it. And as all the heathen on the face of the earth are possessed of this

moral discernment, so they are all capable of feeling their obligation to do right, and to avoid doing wrong, in all cases. This the apostle expressly declares in the verses following the text. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another." The heathen by nature have the knowledge of duty, because by nature they have a moral discernment. Without any other law than conscience, they are capable of discerning what is morally right and morally wrong, and their moral obligation to do the one and avoid the other. And since they know their obligation without law, they are capable of violating it without law, which is precisely the same as sinning without law. This leads me to observe,

3. The scripture represents them as actually sinning in the most gross and criminal manner. They are under moral obligation, and they know they are under moral obligation to do their duty, and yet they violate their obligation, by doing things of the most inhuman and atrocious nature. Their hearts are at variance with their conscience. No nations are more malevolent and cruel than the heathen nations all over the world. "Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known." Though they have not sinned against God, whom they have not known, nor against Christ, of whom they have not heard, yet they have sinned against one another in the most inhuman manner. They neglect to do what they know to be right, and do what they know to be wrong, and thus continually sin without law. It only remains to show,

III. That they must also perish without law.

This the apostle expressly asserts in the text. "For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law."

To establish this serious and interesting truth, I shall observe,

1. Though the heathen sin without law, yet their sin deserves eternal destruction. The ill-desert of sin does not depend upon law. Whatsoever is criminal deserves punishment. Sin and the desert of punishment cannot be separated. And whatsoever deserves to be punished, deserves to be punished forever. The reason is, punishment cannot take away, nor diminish the ill-desert of sin. It is the very nature of sin to deserve punishment. Until, therefore, the nature of sin be

changed, it must deserve to be punished. But there is nothing in the nature of punishment to change the nature of sin. Upon this ground, sin committed without law, as well as sin committed against law, deserves to be punished forever, though not with an equal degree of positive evil. This our Saviour has told us is true, when he said, "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." Heathen, who sin without law, deserve eternal punishment, as really as those who sin against the law and the gospel; though they do not deserve so great or heavy a punishment. The least sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and in that which is to come. Though the heathen are not so criminal as gospel sinners, yet they are criminal enough to deserve everlasting destruction.

2. Since the heathen, who sin without law, deserve endless punishment, God has a right to make them forever miserable without law. He has an original and absolute right to punish his reasonable creatures for doing anything which is wrong, whether he had previously forbidden them to do it, or not. A parent has a right to punish a child for doing that which he knew to be wrong, though he had never expressly forbidden such conduct. Though God has never forbidden the heathen to do things worthy of death, yet since they have done things worthy of death, he has a right to make them suffer eternal death, the proper wages of sin. His right to punish does not depend upon law, but upon his absolute sovereignty over his own guilty creatures. The heathen are his creatures, though they know him not, and he has a right to dispose of them to all eternity, according to strict justice, which requires him to reward every one according to his works. I may add moreover,

3. That God has told us in his word, that the heathen, who sin without law, shall perish without law. God might, if he had pleased, have saved the heathen, notwithstanding their desert of eternal destruction; but he has let us know in his word, that he determines to cast them off forever. He has already caused many of them to perish. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah were heathen, and them, we are told, he has "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." David says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." And he prays for the destruction of the heathen. "Thou, therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen." And again he prays,

"Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name." More passages might be quoted, and more things said upon this head, but it is needless to enlarge. The will of God respecting the state of the heathen, seems to be clearly and fully revealed in his word. He represents them as sinful, guilty creatures, and as such declares that they shall perish. And there is nothing to be alleged against this sovereign determination of the Judge of all the earth. He has brought them into being, and made them capable of choosing good or evil; but they have chosen evil rather than good, and therefore he may give them their reward, even everlasting destruction.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If men may be under moral obligation without law; then Adam might have sinned and fallen without eating of the forbidden fruit.

Many have supposed that the law given to Adam on that point contained the whole of his duty, and that there was no other way of sinning, but by transgressing that law. But his moral obligation was far more extensive than the bare prohibition of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. His moral obligation extended to everything right in the nature of things; and had he violated his moral obligation in a single point, he would have sinned, and deserved to perish forever. God's forbidding him to do one thing, did not give him license to do whatever else he pleased. When a parent tells a child not to go near the well, this does not give him leave to run into the fire. Though God allowed Adam to eat the fruit of every tree in the garden, and to exercise dominion over all the lower creation, yet if he had eaten of the fruit of any tree in the garden to excess, or wantonly injured or abused one of the animals committed to his care and disposal, he would have violated moral obligation, forfeited all the blessings of Paradise, and deserved that death which is the proper wages of sin. Though he was without all law but one, yet if he had violated that moral obligation which every moral agent is under, he would have been guilty of sin, and deserved to perish without law. His eating of the forbidden fruit was a violation of his moral obligation to obey his Maker. The violation of any moral obligation is a sin; and every sin deserves endless punishment. Hence it is easy to determine with certainty what kind of death was threatened to Adam for his first transgression. It

was certainly that kind of death which is a punishment, and that punishment which every sin deserves. There is no ground to suppose that the death threatened was mere annihilation, or ceasing to exist, which is no punishment; nor that it was mere spiritual death, which is no punishment; nor mere natural death, which was not equal to his guilt or ill-desert; but it must have been eternal death, or everlasting punishment, which is the proper wages of sin, and which will be inflicted upon his finally impenitent posterity at the last day.

2. If the heathen can sin without law, then it is easy to see how all the posterity of Adam became sinners without law.

It appears from scripture, observation, and experience, that all mankind are actually sinners. There is no man that liveth and sinneth not. Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin; and "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." All the children of Adam, without a single exception, are actually sinners. But how have all the posterity of Adam actually become sinners? It is certain that they have not become sinners by breaking that law which was given to their father in the state of innocence; for they were never under that law. It is equally certain that they have not become sinners by having the guilt of their father's first sin imputed to them; for it never was imputed to them, and if it had been imputed to them, it was impossible, in the nature of things, that it should have made them sinners. The truth is, that all mankind have always become sinners without law. Cain and Abel became sinners without law; for they sinned before any law was given to them, or could be binding upon them. And all mankind from Cain to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, and from Abraham to Christ, became sinners without law; for they all sinned before any law was given to them which they could understand, and which could be binding upon them. Though the apostle allows, in the fifth of Romans, that all mankind have become sinners *in consequence* of Adam's first transgression, yet he points out a plain distinction between his sin and theirs. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, *for that all have sinned;* for *until* the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." Adam began to sin under law, or by transgressing a particular law given to him, and threatening him with death in case of disobedience. But all his posterity have always begun to sin without law, or before any law of God could bind

them to obedience. They begin to sin as soon as they become moral agents, and they become moral agents in infancy, and before they know the existence of God, or any of his precepts or prohibitions in his word. They sin first without law, and not after the similitude of Adam's first transgression. He began to sin by transgressing a known law of God, but they begin to sin without knowing any law of God whatever. This distinction between the first sin of Adam and the first sin of all his posterity, it is very necessary to understand and maintain, in order to understand and maintain some important doctrines of divine revelation.

3. If all the posterity of Adam become sinners in their infancy without law; then the atonement of Christ was absolutely necessary, in order to render it consistent with the moral character of God to pardon and save any of the human race.

Some who profess to believe the gospel, deny the necessity of Christ's atonement in order that God might consistently forgive and save sinners. They suppose that if transgressors repent, they themselves make a complete atonement for their sins, upon the sole ground of which God can and does forgive and save them from all future punishment. Some, who allow that Christ did suffer and die to make a universal atonement for the sins of the whole world, yet suppose that God might, if he had pleased, have saved sinners from the wrath to come, in some other way than by the vicarious death of the Son of his love. But upon this supposition, the atonement of Christ was rather expedient, than absolutely necessary. It appears, however, from both scripture and fact, that there was no other person in the universe but Jesus Christ, who possessed every divine perfection, that could make such an atonement for the guilty world as to render it consistent with the moral character of God to pardon and save any of the sinful race of Adam. The reason why God was willing to give his Son to die, the just for the unjust, was, because he saw no other possible way of saving sinners from that everlasting ruin which they justly deserved. This was plainly Christ's meaning when he said, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should *not perish*, but have everlasting life." The reason why Christ was willing to suffer and die on the cross to make atonement for sin, was, because he saw no other possible way to save sinners from future and endless destruction. It is very evident, therefore, that the atonement of Christ was not merely expedient, but absolutely necessary, in order that God might consistently save those who have sinned without law, and deserved to perish without law.

All the posterity of Adam are in this perishing condition; for they have all sinned without law in their infancy, by the violation of moral obligation, which is a sin that deserves everlasting punishment. God is under the same moral obligation to punish those who have sinned without law, as to punish those who have sinned under law. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary that Christ by his death on the cross should make a complete and universal atonement for sin, in order to render it consistent with the moral character of God to pardon and save either Jews or Gentiles, or any one of the human race. Hence says the apostle, "Without shedding of blood is no remission." And speaking of himself and other believers he says, "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins—that he might be *just*, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." If God had given no law to Adam in Paradise, and if he had violated any moral obligation without law, he would have deserved to perish without law, and God could not consistently with his moral character have forgiven and saved him from eternal death, the proper wages of sin. The necessity of Christ's atonement was founded in the nature of sin, which deserves eternal punishment. God could not have forgiven sin, without a full expression of his perfect hatred of it, consistently with his pure holiness and inflexible justice; or he could not have been just to himself, and yet pardon and justify the penitent believer. The necessity of Christ's atonement was on God's account, and not on the account of sinners. And it was necessary on God's account, not merely to render it consistent with his veracity, but more especially with his justice, to pardon the transgressors of any law which threatened eternal death to the disobedient. Many suppose the atonement of Christ was principally, if not solely necessary, in order to render it consistent with the veracity of God to forgive sinners, after he had threatened in his law to punish them with eternal death. God never pledges his veracity to inflict the penalty of any law upon the transgressors of it. He might have forgiven Adam and all his posterity without an atonement, consistently with his veracity and the penalty of his law, but not consistently with his justice. Christ did not, therefore, suffer and die on the cross merely to honor any divine law, but to maintain the moral rectitude of God, and display his holy and inflexible justice in forgiving and saving those who sinned without law and under law, and deserved to perish without law. This is the only solid ground, upon

which the absolute necessity of Christ's atonement in order to the salvation of sinners, can be maintained.

4. If all mankind begin to sin without law, as we have seen; then their moral obligation to do right, and to avoid doing wrong, is *primarily* founded in the nature of things, and not upon any law which God has ever given them. Many imagine that all moral obligation is founded in the moral law; but the truth is, all moral law is founded in the nature of things, or in the relation which God bears to his creatures, and which they bear to him and to one another. It is true, God has given both positive and moral laws to some of mankind, and they are binding upon all those to whom they are given, because they are founded in the nature of things, and not merely because they are sanctioned by his divine authority. Mere moral obligation has no precepts nor prohibitions, and therefore is not clothed with the authority of any being in the universe; but all the positive and moral laws of God contain both precepts and prohibitions, which are sanctioned by divine authority, which creates an obligation to duty, that is distinct from the obligations founded in the nature of things. Without seeing this wide distinction between law and moral obligation, it is difficult to see the absolute necessity of a universal atonement for sin, in order to open the door for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, or those who have sinned in the law and those who have sinned without law. Accordingly we find that those who deny the universal atonement of Christ, equally deny that any moral obligation is founded in the nature of things, and maintain that all moral obligation is founded in the law of God. They say that whatever God commands is right merely because he commands it; and whatever he forbids is wrong merely because he has forbidden it. Now it is easy to see that on this supposition there was no necessity of Christ's dying for all mankind, but only for those who have broken some known law of God. Hence we must conclude that the atonement of Christ has been, for nearly six thousand years past, extremely limited; for very few of mankind in this long period have broken any known law of God. But if we allow that those who maintain that all moral obligation is founded on the law of God, and that Christ died only for them who have broken his known law, are consistent with themselves; yet we cannot allow any to be consistent with themselves, who believe that a universal atonement was necessary to maintain the truth, justice, dignity and importance of the divine law. Most who have written in favor of the universal atonement of Christ, have argued the necessity of it principally, if not solely, on the ground of the divine law.

But there appears to be no weight in this argument; for as soon as it became certain, in consequence of Adam's first transgression, that all his posterity would become sinners without law, and deserve to perish without law, there was an absolute necessity of a full and universal atonement, in order to render it consistent with the justice, or moral character of God, to offer and grant salvation to any of the guilty race of Adam.

SERMON XXIII.

SUPERIORITY OF MEN TO ANIMALS.

"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding."—Ps. xxxii. 9.

"The proper study of mankind is man." To know our own nature, powers, and capacities, and to understand our connections, relations, and obligations, is highly necessary, in order to act agreeably to our rank in creation, and to the end of our being. Our Creator and Lawgiver has adapted all his precepts to our powers and capacities. He neither requires us to act like creatures above us, nor like creatures below us, but commands us to act like men. Whenever, therefore, we disregard his authority, and blindly follow our perverse inclinations, he upbraids us for our stupidity, absurdity, and folly, by comparing us with inferior creatures, and reminding us of the dignity of our nature. He commands us to show ourselves men, and not to be as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding. To enter into this, as well as many other divine precepts, it is necessary to draw the line of distinction between men and the lower animals. The above passage suggests, that we possess some powers and faculties, of which they are entirely destitute; but this does not imply, that there is no resemblance between rational and irrational creatures. Though the horse and the mule are said to have no understanding, yet we are told, "the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming;" and that "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." These are plain intimations, that there is some resemblance between men and other species of living creatures.

I. I shall consider wherein men are not superior to *some* irrational creatures. And,

and obvious meaning of this is, that where there is no law there is no transgression of law; though there may be sin, by some other way than by transgressing law. And to make it appear that the heathen may sin without transgressing any divine command, I would observe,

1. That they may be under moral obligation to do right, without law. Moral obligation is founded in the nature of things, and is prior to and independent of all written or verbal obligations. No law can make that right which is wrong in the nature of things, nor that wrong which is right in the nature of things. It is right in the nature of things, that men who are moral beings, should love one another; and wrong in its own nature, that that they should hate one another. It is right in the nature of things that the heathen, who are moral beings, should love one another, and wrong in the nature of things, that they should feel and express a contrary, malevolent spirit. Hence they are under moral obligation to do what is right, and to refrain from what is wrong in all cases. This obligation does not depend upon their knowing God, or knowing his laws; nor upon their knowing his existence. If there were no God, the heathen and all the rest of mankind would be under moral obligation to love one another, and to express their love in a proper manner. As it does not depend upon the will, or law, or existence of God, whether two and two shall be equal to four, so it does not depend upon the will, or law, or existence of God, whether men shall be obliged to love one another as themselves. This is an immutable duty, as the other is an immutable truth; and they are both founded in the nature of things. Those, therefore, who are without law, are under moral obligation to do right, as well as those who are under law; and this their moral obligation will bind them in all cases, in all places, and in all times, as long as they remain moral agents.

2. The heathen may know their moral obligation to do right, without law. If moral obligation does not depend upon law for its existence, then the knowledge of its existence does not depend upon law. If the heathen are bound without law, then they may know that they are bound, without law. Their moral obligation is founded in the fitness of things, and they are endued with a moral discernment to discover that fitness. Their moral sense enables them to discover what is right and what is wrong in the nature of things. This moral sense is what is called conscience, which is a faculty that tells all men their duty, and makes them feel their obligation to do it. And as all the heathen on the face of the earth are possessed of this

moral discernment, so they are all capable of feeling their obligation to do right, and to avoid doing wrong, in all cases. This the apostle expressly declares in the verses following the text. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another." The heathen by nature have the knowledge of duty, because by nature they have a moral discernment. Without any other law than conscience, they are capable of discerning what is morally right and morally wrong, and their moral obligation to do the one and avoid the other. And since they know their obligation without law, they are capable of violating it without law, which is precisely the same as sinning without law. This leads me to observe,

3. The scripture represents them as actually sinning in the most gross and criminal manner. They are under moral obligation, and they know they are under moral obligation to do their duty, and yet they violate their obligation, by doing things of the most inhuman and atrocious nature. Their hearts are at variance with their conscience. No nations are more malevolent and cruel than the heathen nations all over the world. "Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known." Though they have not sinned against God, whom they have not known, nor against Christ, of whom they have not heard, yet they have sinned against one another in the most inhuman manner. They neglect to do what they know to be right, and do what they know to be wrong, and thus continually sin without law. It only remains to show,

III. That they must also perish without law.

This the apostle expressly asserts in the text. "For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law."

To establish this serious and interesting truth, I shall observe,

1. Though the heathen sin without law, yet their sin deserves eternal destruction. The ill-desert of sin does not depend upon law. Whatsoever is criminal deserves punishment. Sin and the desert of punishment cannot be separated. And whatsoever deserves to be punished, deserves to be punished forever. The reason is, punishment cannot take away, nor diminish the ill-desert of sin. It is the very nature of sin to deserve punishment. Until, therefore, the nature of sin be

a mountain, we can, from these ideas, form the idea of a golden mountain. From the idea of men and of the world in which we live, we can form the idea of a world having rational inhabitants ten times smaller, or ten times larger than men. By the power of abstraction, we can form innumerable imaginary objects, which never have existed and never will exist. This power the author of nature has been pleased to bestow upon us, in distinction from all creatures destitute of intelligence. Mr. Locke considers the power of imagination as the grand characteristic of rationality, which distinguishes men from all creatures void of intelligence and incapable of forming abstract ideas.

3. Men have the power of perceiving cause and effect, and the marks of wisdom and design in all the works of nature and of art, which gives them a superiority above all unintelligent creatures. We are capable of discerning the laws of nature and the various powers of all the creatures and objects around us. When we see fire consuming wood, and water suffocating living creatures, we immediately perceive, that fire is the cause of consuming wood, and water the cause of drowning animals. And by observing these effects frequently, we perceive that the causes of them are fixed and permanent; or that fire will always burn and water will always drown. When we see a man do repeated acts of kindness, we view him as a kind and benevolent man, and expect that benevolence will continue to mark his character. Or when we find any animal fierce and malignant, we suppose it is his nature to be so. The lion and the bear are always to be feared and shunned. When we view a clock, a house, or a ship, we not only perceive that they are effects produced by some cause, but by some intelligent, designing cause. So when we view the heavens and the earth, and the various animate and inanimate objects around us, we not only discover that they owe their existence to some cause, but to some wise, intelligent cause. We discover clear evidence of the Author's character and perfections. Now, it is evident that mere perception of these objects conveys no perception of power, wisdom, or design; for we often behold them without having any sense of their being the works of God, and the effects of his power and wisdom. The perception of cause and effect is something more than the bare perception of objects. Animals have the perception of objects as clearly as we have. They see the sun, moon, and stars, and the earth with all that is upon it, as clearly and distinctly as we do; but there is no ground to think, that they have the least idea, that these objects are the effects of some powerful,

designing cause. The most sagacious animals have not the least conception of any wise and powerful cause or agent, who made the world, though the mighty evidences of his eternal power and Godhead lie as clearly before their eyes, as ours. The reason is, they are totally incapable of having the perception of cause and effect; for if they had this capacity, they could reason from effect to cause, and learn the existence of the Deity. When the horse or the ox finds a fat pasture, which affords him delicious food, he has no thought or perception of its being the effect of his master's cultivation. Hence we must conclude, that the perception of *cause and effect* is peculiar to men, and is owing to a peculiar power, faculty, or capacity of their minds, which raises them far higher in the scale of being than any of the irrational creation, which are never capable of obtaining the knowledge of God, or of religion.

4. Men have the power or capacity of distinguishing between truth and error, which is another property of human nature. We have the power of distinguishing between reality and fiction. We know intuitively, that the objects around us are realities, and not mere phantoms or appearances. We know that we have seen the sun, moon, and stars; the earth, and what grows and moves upon it; we know that we have seen mankind, who are active, intelligent beings; *we know*, I say, we have seen all these objects, and that they are absolute realities, and are no fictions of the imagination. This perception of reality, in distinction from fiction, is derived from a distinct power or faculty of the human mind. It is a capacity of having an intuitive view of truth, without a train of reasoning or reflection. If we were not endued with this *sense of truth*, no arguments could convince us of the real existence of any external objects. But it may be questioned, whether the animal creation have any such perception of truth and reality as we have; or whether they know that the objects with which they are conversant, have a *real* existence. It is not likely that they have an idea of the reality of their own existence, or of the real existence of anything else. They appear to be as destitute of the knowledge of reality as deranged persons often are. Though such persons perceive objects as clearly as others, and often reason about them with great accuracy and acuteness; yet they have no idea of the distinction between reality and fiction. They take their own imaginations to be substantial realities. They verily think they have the proper exercise of their rational powers, and know not that they are under the entire dominion of an unregulated imagination. But when they come to themselves, they know that they are in their right

mind, and often know that they have been otherwise. This power of distinguishing reality from fiction, is a proper check to the power of imagination, without which it would run wild, and involve us in error, delusion, and misery.

5. Men have a capacity of uniting in affection with all intelligent beings and sensitive natures, which is one of the superior properties of the human species. Animals are capable of exercising love, pity, and compassion towards one another, but are totally incapable of extending their mutual, sympathetic feelings any further. But mankind are capable of extending their benevolent affections to all intelligent beings, and to all intelligent and unintelligent creatures. They can unite in affection with God, with Christ, with angels, with saints, and extend their benevolent regard to all their fellow-creatures. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast," and can pity its distress, or rejoice in its happiness. In a word, men are capable of universal benevolence, and of uniting in affection with all holy beings; and of course, capable of participating in all the happiness in the universe, so far as it comes within the circle of their knowledge. This high prerogative of men places them near the highest orders of beings, and fits them for the everlasting enjoyment of all good. I must add,

6. Men have the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong, or moral good and moral evil. This faculty is sometimes called the moral sense, but more generally conscience. It is distinct from perception, reason, imagination, or any other faculty of the mind. It is that which is conversant about moral objects only; and with respect to them, it speaks with authority. It commands; it forbids; it promises; it threatens; it punishes and rewards. It directs what *ought* to be done, and what *ought not* to be done. It accuses men when they do wrong; and approves of them when they do right. It calls men to account for all their conduct, and will judge them without leave. It pronounces judgment with a positive and decisive tone, and forbids all appeal. Though all the other faculties of the soul should rise up against it, it is able to silence them all, and reduce them to submission. It is the vicegerent of God in the soul; and speaks and acts with divine authority. This faculty is absolutely essential to moral agency, without which no creature is capable of moral action. If animals were possessed of every other intellectual faculty while devoid of this, they could not be moral agents, nor subjects of moral government. And that they are really devoid of this moral faculty, there is no ground to doubt. Though they have natural affection for their offspring, watch over them, protect

them, and supply their wants; yet they have no idea of duty, or a sense of moral obligation to do what their instinct prompts them to do. The human race have the like care and affection for their children, and not only so, but have a sense of duty and obligation. They feel that they ought to love their children, that they ought to protect them, that they ought to provide for them, and that they ought to treat them kindly, tenderly, and faithfully in all respects. Though the ant provides in summer for winter, yet she feels no moral obligation to do it; but men feel that they ought, that it is their duty, that they are under moral obligation, to provide in summer for winter, and that if they should neglect it, it would be a moral evil, and deserve punishment. The reason is, they have a moral sense, or conscience, which plainly tells them their duty. It is this faculty of conscience, that constitutes them moral agents and subjects of moral government. Thus it appears, that the power of reason, the power of the imagination, the power of discerning cause and effect, the power of distinguishing truth from error, the power of extending benevolent affection toward God and all his intelligent and unintelligent creatures, and the power of perceiving the difference between moral good and evil, comprise all the intellectual faculties, which form that rationality in men, that renders them moral agents, and places them at the head of this lower creation.

Now, to confirm the distinction that has been made between mankind and all the irrational tribes, I will suggest the following considerations.

In the first place, we may account for all that we see in animals, which bears any resemblance of rationality, without supposing them to be possessed of any of the six faculties, which have been mentioned as peculiar to men. Their perception, volition, memory, appetites and passions, are sufficient to account for all we find them capable of doing, without one rational faculty, and therefore there is no ground to think that they possess anything which is the same as reason in men.

In the second place, if they really possessed any rational powers or faculties, we might expect they would be capable of cultivation and improvement, like the human powers and faculties. But this we find to be contrary to universal observation and experience. They cannot be taught to speak, or to learn any art or science.

In the third place, animals appear to have no occasion for any portion of rationality, in order to perpetuate their race, or to protect their lives, or to promote any happiness which they

are capable of enjoying. And hence we may conclude, that their Creator has not given them any rational faculty.

In the fourth place, the scripture represents them as totally devoid of all such rational powers as belong to men. The horse and the mule are said to have no understanding. And this is asserted of the ostrich in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job. "Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labor is in vain without fear; because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding."

Lastly. The scripture tells us, that "the spirit of man goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast goeth downward to the earth," at death. These expressions plainly intimate, that the spirits of beasts perish with their bodies, and in this respect widely differ from the spirits of men, which survive their bodies and exist forever. But if beasts were endowed with the same faculties in kind, that men are, they would be moral agents and accountable for all their actions. And if this were the case, we cannot suppose that God would annihilate them at death. These considerations may put it beyond doubt, that men are endowed with those principles of rationality, which constitute them moral agents and accountable creatures, which distinguish them from all the lower creation, and which qualify them to have dominion over the beasts of the field, and every living creature that lives and moves on the earth, in the air, or in the sea.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Are men endowed with perception, reason, memory, and the other powers and faculties which have been mentioned? Hence we learn the foundation of moral obligation. This is a subject which has been much controverted, and concerning which various opinions have been entertained. Nor is the point yet settled to the satisfaction of all. The question is often put, Why ought we to love and obey God? Why ought we to love our fellow-men? Why ought we to speak the truth? Some would say, We ought to do all those things because God has commanded us to do them. But this answer is not satisfactory; for there is a previous question. Why ought we to

obey the command of God? Merely God's commanding a thing does not make it right, and his merely forbidding a thing does not make it wrong. Right and wrong are founded in the nature of things, and not in the mere will or pleasure of any being in the universe. If God should command us to hate him, we should not be under moral obligation to hate him; or if he should command us to hate our fellow-men, we should not be under moral obligation to hate them; or if he should command us to speak that which is false, with a design to deceive and injure any man, we should not be under moral obligation to obey such a command. God appeals to men to judge with respect to the rectitude of his conduct, and the righteousness of his commands and prohibitions. "O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard." "Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel, Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?" The question still returns, What is the foundation of ought and ought not, or of moral obligation? Our subject gives a short, plain, and full answer to all these queries. We ought to do some things, and ought not to do others, because we are *Men*, possessed of rational and moral powers, by which we are capable of knowing what is right and wrong in the nature of things. If we were not men and possessed of mental powers and faculties, which render us capable of knowing what is right and what is wrong in its own nature, no moral obligation could take hold of us, or bind us in the least degree. But the bare knowledge of what is right binds us to do it, and the bare knowledge of what is wrong binds us to avoid it. If it should be asked, why could not God make it right for us to do what is wrong in the nature of things, or make it wrong for us to do what is right in the nature of things, the reason in both cases is, because we are men, and know what is right and what is wrong in the nature of things; and so long as we *know* this distinction between right and wrong, our knowledge lays us under moral and immutable obligation to do what is right and avoid what is wrong, independently of the will or law of God to the contrary. Moral obligation, as we have said, does not result from the bare *will* of any being whatever, but from the nature of moral beings, and their mutual relations to one another, which they are capable of knowing. God has power to govern us, as we govern the horse and mule, with bit and bridle; but not by moral laws, were we not *moral* agents, and capable of knowing the difference between moral good and evil. Hence it appears that all *moral* obligation is founded in the nature of things, and cannot

result from the mere will, authority, or law of any Being in the universe.

2. It appears from the nature and moral capacity of men, that they are under moral obligation to be *religious*. Their capacity for knowing, loving, and serving God, lays them under moral obligation to know, to love, and serve him. Only draw the character of God, and describe his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his justice, and his supremacy before the mind of the most ignorant and uncultivated savage, and as soon as he understands and believes the great and amiable character of the Creator of the world, he will feel that he ought, that he is *morally bound* to love him and pay him religious homage and worship. Or in other words, that he ought to love the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength, as well as to love any of his fellow-men. He will feel that he ought to love and serve his Maker, as really as he ought to do acts of kindness and justice towards mankind. There is not a man in the world who is not capable of knowing that the worship of God is a reasonable service. Religion, therefore, is not the invention of politicians, nor the effect of priestcraft, but is the dictate of every man's conscience. No nation has been found so ignorant, stupid, and barbarous, as to be entirely void of all sense of moral obligation to be religious. Though a great part of mankind have lost the knowledge of the proper object of religious worship, yet they have not lost all sense of the duty of religion. This possesses the minds of men in general, and leads them to worship false gods, rather than none. Nor is it possible to eradicate all sense of their moral obligation to worship and adore some being whom they consider as supreme, without destroying their intellectual and moral powers. Whilst these remain, they cannot help feeling their moral obligation to pay religious homage to some superior being. Let but the proper object of worship be known, and every man in the world would feel that it is as much his duty as interest to fear, love, obey, and serve God, and what he could not neglect without wounding his own conscience, and plunging himself in guilt and misery.

3. If the rational powers and faculties of men lay them under moral obligation to do their duty; then the commands of God bind bad men as well as good. Our obligation to obey God does not arise from our disposition or inclination to obey him, but from our capacity to obey him. If a man hates God, this does not destroy his obligation to love him. If a man loves sin, this does not destroy his obligation to hate it. If a man hates holiness, this does not destroy his obligation to love

it. If a man is inclined to lie, this does not destroy his obligation to speak the truth. If a man has no heart to get wisdom, this does not destroy his obligation to improve the price in his hand to get it. If a man has no heart to pray, this does not destroy his obligation to pray. Christ spake a parable "to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." Let men's character be what it may, they ought always to pray. They cannot be released from this obligation. As they are capable of seeing their own wants, of feeling their own dependence, and of knowing God's all-sufficiency, they are under indispensable moral obligation to pray for every temporal and spiritual blessing which they need. It is true they cannot be bound to pray wickedly, which is an abomination to God. Every one must know and acknowledge what David did. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Every one knows that the want of sincerity is no excuse for hypocrisy. The vilest wretch on earth knows that his vileness does not destroy his moral obligation to be truly virtuous and pious. The divine commands bind all men, whether righteous or wicked, to pay universal obedience to the known will of God. To tell sinners, then, that their prayers and all their conduct are an abomination to the Lord, does not imply that they ought not to pray, or do any other duty. It does not imply that their moral obligation to obey one of the divine commands is abated or destroyed. Let their character and disposition be ever so corrupt, they are still bound by divine authority to cease to do evil and learn to do well. And this turning from sin to holiness is their first duty, which they are under moral obligation to perform before they perform it; so that they have no right to say, as they often do, that those who forbid them to pray sinfully, forbid them to pray at all. For they are capable of turning from sin immediately, and their ability to turn from it, lays them under moral obligation to turn and pray immediately with holy love and submission to God.

4. Since all men are possessed of rational powers and faculties, they are all under moral obligation to believe the existence and perfections of the only living and true God. He has given them the capacity of discerning cause and effect, and of course of reasoning from cause to effect. When they look around upon the world, and the multitude of the visible objects contained in it, they are capable of seeing that they must all be the effects of some wise, powerful, and benevolent cause, who brought them out of nothing into existence. The world bears plain and incontestable evidences of the being and perfections

of its Creator, which all men are capable of seeing and believing. All men in all parts of the world are capable of tracing effects to their causes, and by this mode of reasoning, of demonstrating the existence of their Maker. So the apostle expressly asserts: "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they (the heathen) are without excuse," who deny his existence. The world bears so many marks and signatures of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, that men who possess the power of reasoning and tracing effects to their causes, are utterly inexcusable if they do not see and believe that it owes its existence to a wise, powerful, benevolent Cause. Voltaire, and the other atheistical French philosophers, were extremely criminal in denying the existence of the Creator and Governor of the world; and so are all the atheists at this day. All men in all other cases reason from effects to their causes. Who can examine any piece of machinery without discovering the hand and the ingenuity of the artificer? But there is unspeakably more power, more wisdom, and more goodness displayed in the works of creation, than ever have been or can be displayed in the works of art. And we have higher evidence of the existence and perfections of God, than of any other existence, but our own.

5. Since men are endowed with rational powers, it is absurd for any to deny the truth and divinity of the Bible. It bears the image and superscription of the Deity. Its precepts and prohibitions, its promises and threatenings, and the wise and gracious scheme of redemption which it unfolds, all unitedly carry conviction to every man's reason and conscience, that it is the word of God and not the word of men. It must have come from God, or from false or wicked impostors. But could such men write such a book as the Bible? Or if they could, would they have written such a book? It is just such a book as mankind need, and just such a book as they might have reasonably expected God would give them, if he had been pleased to reveal his mind and will to them. And it comes with just such credentials as are best adapted to gain belief. If men would examine this sacred volume rationally and impartially, must they not discover plain and incontestable marks of its divine original? But on the other hand, what marks can they discover of its coming from false and wicked impostors? What motives could they have in writing a book, which represents God as the greatest and best of beings, which represents good men as the excellent of the earth, and which represents bad

men in the most odious colors? It becomes Deists to show themselves men, and exercise their noble rational powers in examining the authenticity and inspiration of the holy scriptures. They have no more right to disbelieve, without reason, than others have to believe, without reason. They have no right to despise and reject the Bible without reading it through, as Thomas Paine said he did, and as many other novices in infidelity probably do. The Bible claims to come from God, and men are under moral obligation to examine its claims rationally and impartially; and if they do this, we are not concerned about the consequence.

6. Since men possess rational and moral powers, it is absurd and criminal for any to deny the distinction between virtue and vice. This distinction is founded in the nature of things, and every man has a conscience or moral faculty, by which he is capable of seeing the distinction between right and wrong, selfishness and benevolence, virtue and vice. But this distinction has often been denied by those who discard divine Revelation. They have justified the grossest vices and immoralities, and condemned humility and other Christian graces and moral virtues, as human weaknesses. They say that what is called virtue by one nation is called vice by another, from which they pretend to conclude, that there is no essential distinction between them; but this is very superficial reasoning, because it is well known that every nation calls some things right and some things wrong, some things good and some things evil, and some things virtuous and some things vicious; which proves that all nations do in fact see and acknowledge the distinction between virtue and vice. Though they differ in respect to some particular things, yet that difference may be accounted for, by tradition, or education, or moral blindness. Some in the prophet's day were involved in such moral ignorance, that they called good evil and evil good, put darkness for light and light for darkness, and put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. And this is the case in every nation at the present day. Yet they admire and applaud justice, honesty, and liberality; and condemn lying, stealing, murder, and other crimes and vices. To deny the distinction between virtue and vice is contrary to reason, conscience, and the common sense of all mankind, and must be owing to moral ignorance and the criminal blindness of the heart.

7. Since men possess rational and moral powers of mind, they have no right to disbelieve the immortality of the soul. This some of the wisest pagan philosophers denied. Even Cicero expressed his doubts whether the soul would exist after

a mountain, we can, from these ideas, form the idea of a golden mountain. From the idea of men and of the world in which we live, we can form the idea of a world having rational inhabitants ten times smaller, or ten times larger than men. By the power of abstraction, we can form innumerable imaginary objects, which never have existed and never will exist. This power the author of nature has been pleased to bestow upon us, in distinction from all creatures destitute of intelligence. Mr. Locke considers the power of imagination as the grand characteristic of rationality, which distinguishes men from all creatures void of intelligence and incapable of forming abstract ideas.

3. Men have the power of perceiving cause and effect, and the marks of wisdom and design in all the works of nature and of art, which gives them a superiority above all unintelligent creatures. We are capable of discerning the laws of nature and the various powers of all the creatures and objects around us. When we see fire consuming wood, and water suffocating living creatures, we immediately perceive, that fire is the cause of consuming wood, and water the cause of drowning animals. And by observing these effects frequently, we perceive that the causes of them are fixed and permanent; or that fire will always burn and water will always drown. When we see a man do repeated acts of kindness, we view him as a kind and benevolent man, and expect that benevolence will continue to mark his character. Or when we find any animal fierce and malignant, we suppose it is his nature to be so. The lion and the bear are always to be feared and shunned. When we view a clock, a house, or a ship, we not only perceive that they are effects produced by some cause, but by some intelligent, designing cause. So when we view the heavens and the earth, and the various animate and inanimate objects around us, we not only discover that they owe their existence to some cause, but to some wise, intelligent cause. We discover clear evidence of the Author's character and perfections. Now, it is evident that mere perception of these objects conveys no perception of power, wisdom, or design; for we often behold them without having any sense of their being the works of God, and the effects of his power and wisdom. The perception of cause and effect is something more than the bare perception of objects. Animals have the perception of objects as clearly as we have. They see the sun, moon, and stars, and the earth with all that is upon it, as clearly and distinctly as we do; but there is no ground to think, that they have the least idea, that these objects are the effects of some powerful,

designing cause. The most sagacious animals have not the least conception of any wise and powerful cause or agent, who made the world, though the mighty evidences of his eternal power and Godhead lie as clearly before their eyes, as ours. The reason is, they are totally incapable of having the perception of cause and effect; for if they had this capacity, they could reason from effect to cause, and learn the existence of the Deity. When the horse or the ox finds a fat pasture, which affords him delicious food, he has no thought or perception of its being the effect of his master's cultivation. Hence we must conclude, that the perception of *cause and effect* is peculiar to men, and is owing to a peculiar power, faculty, or capacity of their minds, which raises them far higher in the scale of being than any of the irrational creation, which are never capable of obtaining the knowledge of God, or of religion.

4. Men have the power or capacity of distinguishing between truth and error, which is another property of human nature. We have the power of distinguishing between reality and fiction. We know intuitively, that the objects around us are realities, and not mere phantoms or appearances. We know that we have seen the sun, moon, and stars; the earth, and what grows and moves upon it; we know that we have seen mankind, who are active, intelligent beings; *we know*, I say, we have seen all these objects, and that they are absolute realities, and are no fictions of the imagination. This perception of reality, in distinction from fiction, is derived from a distinct power or faculty of the human mind. It is a capacity of having an intuitive view of truth, without a train of reasoning or reflection. If we were not endued with this *sense of truth*, no arguments could convince us of the real existence of any external objects. But it may be questioned, whether the animal creation have any such perception of truth and reality as we have; or whether they know that the objects with which they are conversant, have a *real* existence. It is not likely that they have an idea of the reality of their own existence, or of the real existence of anything else. They appear to be as destitute of the knowledge of reality as deranged persons often are. Though such persons perceive objects as clearly as others, and often reason about them with great accuracy and acuteness; yet they have no idea of the distinction between reality and fiction. They take their own imaginations to be substantial realities. They verily think they have the proper exercise of their rational powers, and know not that they are under the entire dominion of an unregulated imagination. But when they come to themselves, they know that they are in their right

a mountain, we can, from these ideas, form the idea of a golden mountain. From the idea of men and of the world in which we live, we can form the idea of a world having rational inhabitants ten times smaller, or ten times larger than men. By the power of abstraction, we can form innumerable imaginary objects, which never have existed and never will exist. This power the author of nature has been pleased to bestow upon us, in distinction from all creatures destitute of intelligence. Mr. Locke considers the power of imagination as the grand characteristic of rationality, which distinguishes men from all creatures void of intelligence and incapable of forming abstract ideas.

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them, and supply their wants; yet they have no idea of duty, or a sense of moral obligation to do what their instinct prompts them to do. The human race have the like care and affection for their children, and not only so, but have a sense of duty and obligation. They feel that they ought to love their children, that they ought to protect them, that they ought to provide for them, and that they ought to treat them kindly, tenderly, and faithfully in all respects. Though the ant provides in summer for winter, yet she feels no moral obligation to do it; but men feel that they ought, that it is their duty, that they are under moral obligation, to provide in summer for winter, and that if they should neglect it, it would be a moral evil, and deserve punishment. The reason is, they have a moral sense, or conscience, which plainly tells them their duty. It is this faculty of conscience, that constitutes them moral agents and subjects of moral government. Thus it appears, that the power of reason, the power of the imagination, the power of discerning cause and effect, the power of distinguishing truth from error, the power of extending benevolent affection toward God and all his intelligent and unintelligent creatures, and the power of perceiving the difference between moral good and evil, comprise all the intellectual faculties, which form that rationality in men, that renders them moral agents, and places them at the head of this lower creation.

Now, to confirm the distinction that has been made between mankind and all the irrational tribes, I will suggest the following considerations.

In the first place, we may account for all that we see in animals, which bears any resemblance of rationality, without supposing them to be possessed of any of the six faculties, which have been mentioned as peculiar to men. Their perception, volition, memory, appetites and passions, are sufficient to account for all we find them capable of doing, without one rational faculty, and therefore there is no ground to think that they possess anything which is the same as reason in men.

In the second place, if they really possessed any rational powers or faculties, we might expect they would be capable of cultivation and improvement, like the human powers and faculties. But this we find to be contrary to universal observation and experience. They cannot be taught to speak, or to learn any art or science.

In the third place, animals appear to have no occasion for any portion of rationality, in order to perpetuate their race, or to protect their lives, or to promote any happiness which they

are capable of enjoying. And hence we may conclude, that their Creator has not given them any rational faculty.

In the fourth place, the scripture represents them as totally devoid of all such rational powers as belong to men. The horse and the mule are said to have no understanding. And this is asserted of the ostrich in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job. "Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labor is in vain without fear; because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding."

Lastly. The scripture tells us, that "the spirit of man goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast goeth downward to the earth," at death. These expressions plainly intimate, that the spirits of beasts perish with their bodies, and in this respect widely differ from the spirits of men, which survive their bodies and exist forever. But if beasts were endowed with the same faculties in kind, that men are, they would be moral agents and accountable for all their actions. And if this were the case, we cannot suppose that God would annihilate them at death. These considerations may put it beyond doubt, that men are endowed with those principles of rationality, which constitute them moral agents and accountable creatures, which distinguish them from all the lower creation, and which qualify them to have dominion over the beasts of the field, and every living creature that lives and moves on the earth, in the air, or in the sea.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Are men endowed with perception, reason, memory, and the other powers and faculties which have been mentioned? Hence we learn the foundation of moral obligation. This is a subject which has been much controverted, and concerning which various opinions have been entertained. Nor is the point yet settled to the satisfaction of all. The question is often put, Why ought we to love and obey God? Why ought we to love our fellow-men? Why ought we to speak the truth? Some would say, We ought to do all those things because God has commanded us to do them. But this answer is not satisfactory; for there is a previous question. Why ought we to

obey the command of God? Merely God's commanding a thing does not make it right, and his merely forbidding a thing does not make it wrong. Right and wrong are founded in the nature of things, and not in the mere will or pleasure of any being in the universe. If God should command us to hate him, we should not be under moral obligation to hate him; or if he should command us to hate our fellow-men, we should not be under moral obligation to hate them; or if he should command us to speak that which is false, with a design to deceive and injure any man, we should not be under moral obligation to obey such a command. God appeals to men to judge with respect to the rectitude of his conduct, and the righteousness of his commands and prohibitions. "O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard." "Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel, Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?" The question still returns, What is the foundation of ought and ought not, or of moral obligation? Our subject gives a short, plain, and full answer to all these queries. We ought to do some things, and ought not to do others, because we are *Men*, possessed of rational and moral powers, by which we are capable of knowing what is right and wrong in the nature of things. If we were not men and possessed of mental powers and faculties, which render us capable of knowing what is right and what is wrong in its own nature, no moral obligation could take hold of us, or bind us in the least degree. But the bare knowledge of what is right binds us to do it, and the bare knowledge of what is wrong binds us to avoid it. If it should be asked, why could not God make it right for us to do what is wrong in the nature of things, or make it wrong for us to do what is right in the nature of things, the reason in both cases is, because we are men, and know what is right and what is wrong in the nature of things; and so long as we *know* this distinction between right and wrong, our knowledge lays us under moral and immutable obligation to do what is right and avoid what is wrong, independently of the will or law of God to the contrary. Moral obligation, as we have said, does not result from the bare *will* of any being whatever, but from the nature of moral beings, and their mutual relations to one another, which they are capable of knowing. God has power to govern us, as we govern the horse and mule, with bit and bridle; but not by moral laws, were we not *moral* agents, and capable of knowing the difference between moral good and evil. Hence it appears that all *moral* obligation is founded in the nature of things, and cannot

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2. It appears from the nature and moral capacity of men, that they are under moral obligation to be *religious*. Their capacity for knowing, loving, and serving God, lays them under moral obligation to know, to love, and serve him. Only draw the character of God, and describe his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his justice, and his supremacy before the mind of the most ignorant and uncultivated savage, and as soon as he understands and believes the great and amiable character of the Creator of the world, he will feel that he ought, that he is *morally bound* to love him and pay him religious homage and worship. Or in other words, that he ought to love the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength, as well as to love any of his fellow-men. He will feel that he ought to love and serve his Maker, as really as he ought to do acts of kindness and justice towards mankind. There is not a man in the world who is not capable of knowing that the worship of God is a reasonable service. Religion, therefore, is not the invention of politicians, nor the effect of priestcraft, but is the dictate of every man's conscience. No nation has been found so ignorant, stupid, and barbarous, as to be entirely void of all sense of moral obligation to be religious. Though a great part of mankind have lost the knowledge of the proper object of religious worship, yet they have not lost all sense of the duty of religion. This possesses the minds of men in general, and leads them to worship false gods, rather than none. Nor is it possible to eradicate all sense of their moral obligation to worship and adore some being whom they consider as supreme, without destroying their intellectual and moral powers. Whilst these remain, they cannot help feeling their moral obligation to pay religious homage to some superior being. Let but the proper object of worship be known, and every man in the world would feel that it is as much his duty as interest to fear, love, obey, and serve God, and what he could not neglect without wounding his own conscience, and plunging himself in guilt and misery.

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5. Since men are endowed with rational powers, it is absurd for any to deny the truth and divinity of the Bible. It bears the image and superscription of the Deity. Its precepts and prohibitions, its promises and threatenings, and the wise and gracious scheme of redemption which it unfolds, all unitedly carry conviction to every man's reason and conscience, that it is the word of God and not the word of men. It must have come from God, or from false or wicked impostors. But could such men write such a book as the Bible? Or if they could, would they have written such a book? It is just such a book as mankind need, and just such a book as they might have reasonably expected God would give them, if he had been pleased to reveal his mind and will to them. And it comes with just such credentials as are best adapted to gain belief. If men would examine this sacred volume rationally and impartially, must they not discover plain and incontestable marks of its divine original? But on the other hand, what marks can they discover of its coming from false and wicked impostors? What motives could they have in writing a book, which represents God as the greatest and best of beings, which represents good men as the excellent of the earth, and which represents bad

men in the most odious colors? It becomes Deists to show themselves men, and exercise their noble rational powers in examining the authenticity and inspiration of the holy scriptures. They have no more right to disbelieve, without reason, than others have to believe, without reason. They have no right to despise and reject the Bible without reading it through, as Thomas Paine said he did, and as many other novices in infidelity probably do. The Bible claims to come from God, and men are under moral obligation to examine its claims rationally and impartially; and if they do this, we are not concerned about the consequence.

6. Since men possess rational and moral powers, it is absurd and criminal for any to deny the distinction between virtue and vice. This distinction is founded in the nature of things, and every man has a conscience or moral faculty, by which he is capable of seeing the distinction between right and wrong, selfishness and benevolence, virtue and vice. But this distinction has often been denied by those who discard divine Revelation. They have justified the grossest vices and immoralities, and condemned humility and other Christian graces and moral virtues, as human weaknesses. They say that what is called virtue by one nation is called vice by another, from which they pretend to conclude, that there is no essential distinction between them; but this is very superficial reasoning, because it is well known that every nation calls some things right and some things wrong, some things good and some things evil, and some things virtuous and some things vicious; which proves that all nations do in fact see and acknowledge the distinction between virtue and vice. Though they differ in respect to some particular things, yet that difference may be accounted for, by tradition, or education, or moral blindness. Some in the prophet's day were involved in such moral ignorance, that they called good evil and evil good, put darkness for light and light for darkness, and put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. And this is the case in every nation at the present day. Yet they admire and applaud justice, honesty, and liberality; and condemn lying, stealing, murder, and other crimes and vices. To deny the distinction between virtue and vice is contrary to reason, conscience, and the common sense of all mankind, and must be owing to moral ignorance and the criminal blindness of the heart.

7. Since men possess rational and moral powers of mind, they have no right to disbelieve the immortality of the soul. This some of the wisest pagan philosophers denied. Even Cicero expressed his doubts whether the soul would exist after

of its Creator, which all men are capable of seeing and believing. All men in all parts of the world are capable of tracing effects to their causes, and by this mode of reasoning, of demonstrating the existence of their Maker. So the apostle expressly asserts: "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they (the heathen) are without excuse," who deny his existence. The world bears so many marks and signatures of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, that men who possess the power of reasoning and tracing effects to their causes, are utterly inexcusable if they do not see and believe that it owes its existence to a wise, powerful, benevolent Cause. Voltaire, and the other atheistical French philosophers, were extremely criminal in denying the existence of the Creator and Governor of the world; and so are all the atheists at this day. All men in all other cases reason from effects to their causes. Who can examine any piece of machinery without discovering the hand and the ingenuity of the artificer? But there is unspeakably more power, more wisdom, and more goodness displayed in the works of creation, than ever have been or can be displayed in the works of art. And we have higher evidence of the existence and perfections of God, than of any other existence, but our own.

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death. Most of the Deists in Europe, if not in America, are what are called *mortal* Deists, and maintain that the soul dies with the body. But as men, they have no ground for this opinion. Their noble, moral, intellectual powers, which constitute them moral agents and accountable beings, afford them a strong presumption, that they shall continue to exist after death, and be rewarded, or punished for their deeds done in the body. It is true, indeed, this evidence of the immortality of their souls does not amount to strict demonstration, but it does amount to the highest probability, and lays them under obligation to believe their accountability and future existence, and to prepare for it. It is absurd and criminal for men to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," and cease to exist. Reason and conscience give all men a presentiment that they shall exist in a happy or miserable state after death. It becomes them as men, who possess noble intellectual powers and faculties, to show themselves men, and duly prepare for all that awaits them in every future stage of their existence. And it must be extremely dangerous and criminal, to employ all their abilities to convince themselves and others, that they may safely live and die, like the brutes that perish. Hence,

8. This subject teaches the vast importance of self-knowledge. A pagan could say, the precept "Know thyself," came from heaven. The apostle puts the solemn question to Christians, "Know ye not your own selves?" All men are capable of knowing their own selves, and it must be folly and absurdity in the extreme for any men, and especially for Christians, and even for heathen to be ignorant of themselves. But no knowledge has been so much neglected, by the learned and unlearned, the wise and unwise, the great, the rich, and the prosperous, as self-knowledge. Men have been inquisitive in all ages, and spent much time, and thought, and expense, to acquire a large stock of every species of knowledge respecting the improvements which mankind have made in arts, sciences, and literature. But while they have gained the knowledge of these things, they have been grossly ignorant of themselves. Every man carries a little world within himself, by knowing which he might know all the rest of mankind, and form a just estimate of the whole world and of all who live in it. For "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." By knowing his own intellectual powers, a man may know the intellectual powers of all men. They all have the same mental powers, though not in the same vigor and activity. They all have the same native corruption of heart, which leads them to forget and forsake God, to pursue lying vanities, and to neglect

their own eternal good and the eternal good of others. When any man becomes acquainted with his own heart, and is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, he knows more about God, about himself, about his fellow-men, about the world in which they live, the objects which they pursue, and the effects and consequences of their living here and hereafter, than he could learn by merely searching the history of the whole world. If men would only seek after self-knowledge, which is so easy to attain, it would fill their hearts with gratitude to God for making them wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven; for giving them such a noble, rational, and immortal existence; for sending his Son to save them from their guilty and lost condition; for doing them so much good, while they are evil, and abusing his favors; and for preparing them to know, love, serve, and enjoy him forever. At the same time, it would fill them with humiliation and self-abasement for all the injuries they have done to God, to Christ, to the holy Spirit, to saints, to sinners, and to themselves. Since you are men, why will you not seek to know and show yourselves men!

9. Since all men have rational powers and faculties, it is easy for God to give sinners a true knowledge of themselves, and humble them in the dust for living and acting as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. It is only for God to open the eyes of their mind and turn their attention to their own powers and faculties, and their abuse of them, and it will make them appear more vile than the brutes that perish. Such a view of themselves has led many to wish that God had not made them men. And it would be infinitely better for sinners, who employ all their rational powers in contending with their Maker, and opposing his interests and their own forever, if they were not men. Be entreated then to awake from your stupidity and show yourselves men. But if you despise this admonition, God has told you, that you alone must bear the tremendous consequences.

Whether sinners will hear, or forbear to hear, the text, we are to remember, is addressed to saints, and forbids them to be as the horse and mule, which have no understanding. If you will awake out of stupidity, God promises to guide you by his eye, and lead you to employ all your powers and faculties, gifts, and graces, in promoting his glory, the good of your fellow-creatures, and your own future and eternal felicity.

SERMON XXIV.

MORAL INABILITY OF SINNERS.

"And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God."—Joshua, xxiv. 19.

Immediately after the death of Moses, Joshua took the charge of the children of Israel, and conducted them, through hosts of enemies whom he subdued, to the land of promise. And though he was then eighty-five years old, yet he continued to govern the nation for twenty-five years longer. During this period, he divided the land among the twelve tribes, and directed all their civil and religious concerns with great wisdom and integrity. But in the course of nearly thirty years, many of the people died, and others lost the serious impressions which the dangers and trials of the wilderness had made upon their minds, while a younger generation rose up, who had seen less, and known less of the God of their fathers. These causes Joshua foresaw would naturally bring on a religious declension, which he greatly deprecated. Deeply impressed with their danger and his own speedy departure, he called all the people together, and rehearsed their history from the beginning. And in the review of the divine goodness towards them, he exhorted them to fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth; but as for himself and his household, they would serve the Lord. To this the people replied, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for the Lord our God, he it is that brought us up, and our fathers, out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed.—Therefore will we also serve the Lord; for he is our God. And Joshua said unto the people, ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God." These words plainly teach us,

That though sinners think they can, yet they cannot serve the Lord. I shall show,

I. That sinners generally think they can serve the Lord.

II. Why they think they can serve the Lord. And

III. Why they cannot serve him.

I. I am to show, that sinners generally think that they can serve the Lord. I say they generally think so, because they may think otherwise, and do sometimes, under certain circumstances, really think otherwise. But so long as God suffers them to walk in their own way, and pursue the objects which are the most agreeable to their natural hearts, they universally think that they can serve the Lord, whenever they find it convenient or important to serve him. Though they feel a present reluctance to every religious duty, yet they have no apprehension that this reluctance will ever arise so high, as to become unconquerable. They are very confident they can perform that service, which God requires them to perform, in order to obtain his pardoning mercy. This will appear from various considerations.

1. They sometimes secretly intend to serve the Lord. There are many, who have been religiously educated, who early think seriously about their spiritual concerns, and really intend to secure the salvation of their souls before they die. But they find so much reluctance to religious duties, and religious objects, that they totally neglect the service of God. They do not, however, renounce their good intentions in childhood, nor in youth, nor in riper years, but endeavor in some measure to cherish their serious purposes, especially when they hear serious things, or are placed in serious circumstances. And though some may grow very stupid, and grossly disobedient, yet even these have their serious intervals, when their serious intentions recur, and constrain them to re-resolve that they will carry their intention into effect, and sincerely serve the Lord. Now all such secret intentions of sinners necessarily imply, that they really think that they can serve the Lord, and that there is no insurmountable difficulty in the way. They imagine that they can lay aside their present aversion to religion, as easily as their aversion to many things, which they have laid aside. They have laid aside the follies and vanities of youth, for more manly and important pursuits. They have grown wiser, and mean to grow better, and finally devote themselves to the service of God. These secret intentions flow from a belief, that they can, whenever they shall set about it in earnest, perform every religious duty which God has enjoined. They live upon their good intentions, and self-sufficiency, which afford them much

peace, and hope, and confidence, while they are looking forward to long life and prosperity.

2. Sinners not only secretly intend, but secretly attempt to serve the Lord. Some attempt this in childhood; some attempt it in youth; some attempt it, while in the midst of their days, and engaged in the busy scenes of life; some attempt it, when they are sick, or exposed to danger; and some when they are awakened from their stupidity by the word or providence of God. But very few sinners, who enjoy the common means of grace, entirely neglect religious duties, in some stages and circumstances of their lives. Children and youth often read and pray in secret, as well as attend public worship. Many of riper years, who are ashamed to regard God or religion in public, do secretly call upon God, read his word, and strive to serve the Lord, and secure his favor. But no person, whether young or old, would ever attempt to serve God in secret, if he did not hope and expect to succeed. All sinners, who secretly attempt to serve God, manifest by their practice, that they think they can serve the Lord. Whenever sinners begin to perform religious duties, in any stage of life, they begin with self-confidence, that they are able, as well as desirous to serve God. How many sinners have lived from day to day, and from year to year, in the constant practice of seeking and striving to serve God in secret, with entire dependence upon their own strength, to do the whole of their duty? Though after they have once begun to seek God in secret, they often neglect seeking; yet they do not neglect, because they feel unable to serve God, but because they feel an aversion to spiritual and divine objects. For after they have neglected time after time, they will begin again, and strive with renewed and increased exertions. This plainly proves, that they think they can serve the Lord, notwithstanding any depravity or corruption of heart. They imagine, that nothing is wanting to conquer their depravity, but more arduous, vigorous, and persevering exertions; and these they think they can increase, until they have gained the victory, and obtained the favor of God, which is all they desire.

3. Sinners not only secretly intend, and attempt to serve God, but they often publicly declare, that they will serve him. This a multitude of sinners publicly declared to Joshua. They said, "Therefore will we also serve the Lord, for he is our God." The same said those at mount Sinai, who afterward fell and perished in the wilderness. In both these instances, there is reason to believe, that sinners were sincere in making their declarations. They undoubtedly meant to do what they said they would do.

They said they would serve the Lord; and they intended to do what God had required, and be obedient. But if this was true, they certainly thought they could obey and serve the Lord. Thousands and thousands of other sinners since have felt just as those Israelites did, and have made the same declarations, with the same kind and degree of sincerity. It is extremely natural for men in a state of nature, to think that they can serve God, whenever they shall think that their temporal or eternal good requires them to serve him. When sinners, at a solemn time, and under solemn circumstances, publicly declare that they will serve the Lord, we must believe, that they really think they are able to serve him. And this they have done in innumerable instances; which is a clear evidence that all secure sinners really think they can serve God. But we have still higher evidence of this. For,

4. Sinners have not only secretly intended to serve God, and secretly attempted to serve God, and publicly declared that they would serve God, but they have actually thought they did serve him. The scribes and pharisees in Christ's day, really thought they did serve God in sincerity and truth. They punctually observed all the divine commands, whether ceremonial or moral. Our Saviour, who knew their thoughts, reproved them by a parable, because "they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous." The pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, thanked God that he had served him perfectly. The amiable young man declared, that he had kept all the divine commands from his youth. And Paul said, that, while he was a sinner, he had thought himself, in respect to the law, blameless. It was the general opinion of sinners in Christ's day, that they did sincerely and perfectly serve God. Many sinners have ever since entertained the same high opinion of themselves. Thousands have thought, that they have sincerely obeyed the divine commands, while they were under the entire dominion of sin, and totally destitute of every gracious exercise. But it is impossible for sinners to think, that they really serve God, without thinking that they are able to serve him. Though sinners often complain of their inability to serve God, and say that they cannot serve him; yet their intentions, their exertions, their declarations, and their opinions of themselves, unite to demonstrate, that they do inwardly think they can serve God. They think just as sinners thought in the days of Moses, of Joshua, and of Christ. They really believe that they can, and often believe that they do serve God sincerely and acceptably. I now proceed to inquire,

II. Why sinners imagine they can serve the Lord. This

must be owing to some misapprehension of themselves, or ignorance of their own hearts. Though they believe they are sinful creatures, and naturally inclined to forget and forsake God, and disobey his holy commands; yet they do not believe they are altogether sinful, and wholly destitute of all good desires and intentions. Though they know that their hearts are deceitful; yet they do not know that they are desperately wicked, and absolutely unconquerable by their own exertions. They suppose that their desires to serve God are really good, though not so good as they ought to be, because they are too low and languid. This deficiency they often hope and expect that they shall some time or other make up, by more strong and vigorous desires and exertions. Accordingly, when they seriously set about seeking salvation, they become more and more ardent in their seekings and strivings for divine mercy. They do not know that the plague of their own hearts lies in their total selfishness, and entire regard to their own personal safety and happiness. And consequently they do not know, that the higher their desires, hopes, and fears rise, the more they become displeasing in the sight of God, who looks entirely on the heart, and abhors all selfish feelings. If they only knew the nature of their desires, intentions, resolutions, and exertions, they would no longer think that they could yield God a sincere and acceptable service. They would despair of conquering their depravity, by continually increasing it. But all secure and merely awakened sinners, are really ignorant of the nature of their moral depravity, and while they are ignorant of this, they verily think that they can and do serve God in some measure. They consider their good desires and actual attempts to serve God as acceptable in his sight. Thus the Israelites in Joshua's day, verily thought that they had served God, and would continue to serve him as long as they lived. And sinners at the present day, who are ignorant of their own hearts, entertain the same opinion of themselves. Like Paul in his state of ignorance and moral blindness, they flatter themselves, that it is an easy thing to serve God, while their hearts are far from him, and full of perfect selfishness. It now remains to show,

III. Why sinners cannot serve God. Joshua assigned the true reason to the Israelites. "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God." Holiness is the essence of God's moral character. He is pure and perfect love, which is pure and perfect holiness. All his moral perfections are comprised in love. He loves himself and all created beings according to their real worth and importance.

He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. He is the righteous Lord, who loves righteousness, and hates all unrighteousness in his unholy and sinful creatures. He is of purer eyes than to behold sin or iniquity in any form whatever. And for this reason he requires all men to be like himself, in all their views and feelings. He said to his people of old, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." And this precept the apostle tells us, is still binding upon all mankind. So that without holiness none can see, nor serve, nor enjoy God. This leads me to observe,

1. That sinners cannot serve God, because they cannot love him. God is perfectly holy, but they are perfectly unholy. God is perfectly benevolent, but they are perfectly sinful. God seeks the highest good of the universe supremely, but they seek their own good supremely. Their hearts are diametrically opposite to his heart, their desires to his desires, and their exertions to his exertions. And so long as this contrariety in their hearts exists, it is utterly impossible that they should love God for what he is in himself. They may love him for his favors, but this is only loving themselves. God's first and great command to every sinner is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." While sinners are destitute of love to God, it is impossible that they should perform any acceptable service to him. Their carnal minds are enmity against God, and more opposed to him, than to any other being or object in the universe. So far as they discern, they perfectly hate his holiness. And he knows it. Therefore he abhors and condemns all their external services. The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination in his sight, and he expressly forbids them to bring any more such vain oblations. Though sinners often imagine that they mean to serve God, and not themselves, yet God who knows their hearts perfectly, knows that they really seek their own good, and not his glory, and that they never can serve him, so long as their hearts are in perfect contrariety to his.

2. Sinners cannot serve God, because his laws are perfectly holy, like himself. The apostle says, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." God gave his commands from a holy motive, and he requires nothing but holiness in them. They are in all respects holy. And for this reason, unholy creatures cannot obey them. The apostle declares, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." No external obedience of totally depraved creatures, to a holy law, can be pleasing in his

sight. Hence says Solomon, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." It is morally impossible, that sinners should obey the divine laws, which they perfectly hate, both in their precepts and penalties. Christ obeyed his Father's commands out of love to them. He said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." And Paul said, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." So long as sinners do not love God, nor his laws, they cannot serve him. Besides,

3. Sinners cannot serve God, because they do not love his service. There is no part of his service that they love. They do not love to labor for him, nor to pray to him, nor to promote his interest. They love to labor for themselves, and to promote their own interests. They have a different object from that which God has, and which he requires them to have, in all they do. And whatever attempt they make to serve God, their ultimate design in it all, is, not to serve God, but to serve themselves. It is impossible, therefore, while they feel thus, that they should serve God, or do anything but what he abhors.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If sinners think that they can serve the Lord, then it is easy to see why so many live so easy and secure while they neglect to serve him Mankind commonly neglect to pursue what they suppose they can obtain just when they please. It is wholly owing to their confidence in their own power to serve God whenever they think it is necessary, that they neglect it, and live so easy in their neglect. For whenever they imagine that they shall want time, or opportunity, or disposition, to serve God, they are in distress. No one can look upon himself as in immediate danger of perdition, without being affected by it. Hence sickness often throws sinners into distress, and they cry out in great agony of mind, lest they should now die in their sins and lose their souls. Hence conviction of the plague of their own hearts fills them with distress, and they tremble with fearful apprehensions of the wrath of God. They do not find it so easy to serve the Lord as they expected; and they fear that the time of their serving him will soon be past, and they shall be his enemies, and have him for their enemy forever.

2. If sinners are mistaken in thinking that they can serve God, then it is very important that their mistake should be removed, and that they should be made to see and feel that they

cannot serve God, and to know that the reason is because he is a holy God, to whom their whole hearts are opposed. If sinners think they can serve God, because they are ignorant of their own hearts, then it is of great importance that the *nature* of their total depravity should be clearly and fully laid open before them, though they are ever so averse to seeing it. Sinners can struggle a great while with a sense of their sinfulness and exposedness to divine wrath, if they be not thoroughly convinced of their total moral impotency to break the cords of their iniquity, and flee from the wrath to come. It is one of the last things of which sinners are convinced, that all the struggles and strivings of the carnal mind are utterly in vain, and that while they are in the flesh, they cannot please God, and appease his wrath. But of this the Spirit of God convinces sinners before he changes their hearts.

3. If the inability of sinners to serve God arises from the contrariety of their hearts to the heart of God, then it is altogether sinful and inexcusable. They ought to love God and serve him, because he is holy and worthy to be loved and served. But this is the reason why they cannot, and the only reason. Their inability therefore is their sin; and the more unable they are to love God for his holiness, the more inexcusable and sinful they are; because all their inability arises from the utter aversion of their hearts to that which is good.

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8. This subject teaches the vast importance of self-knowledge. A pagan could say, the precept "Know thyself," came from heaven. The apostle puts the solemn question to Christians, "Know ye not your own selves?" All men are capable of knowing their own selves, and it must be folly and absurdity in the extreme for any men, and especially for Christians, and even for heathen to be ignorant of themselves. But no knowledge has been so much neglected, by the learned and unlearned, the wise and unwise, the great, the rich, and the prosperous, as self-knowledge. Men have been inquisitive in all ages, and spent much time, and thought, and expense, to acquire a large stock of every species of knowledge respecting the improvements which mankind have made in arts, sciences, and literature. But while they have gained the knowledge of these things, they have been grossly ignorant of themselves. Every man carries a little world within himself, by knowing which he might know all the rest of mankind, and form a just estimate of the whole world and of all who live in it. For "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." By knowing his own intellectual powers, a man may know the intellectual powers of all men. They all have the same mental powers, though not in the same vigor and activity. They all have the same native corruption of heart, which leads them to forget and forsake God, to pursue lying vanities, and to neglect

their own eternal good and the eternal good of others. When any man becomes acquainted with his own heart, and is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, he knows more about God, about himself, about his fellow-men, about the world in which they live, the objects which they pursue, and the effects and consequences of their living here and hereafter, than he could learn by merely searching the history of the whole world. If men would only seek after self-knowledge, which is so easy to attain, it would fill their hearts with gratitude to God for making them wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven; for giving them such a noble, rational, and immortal existence; for sending his Son to save them from their guilty and lost condition; for doing them so much good, while they are evil, and abusing his favors; and for preparing them to know, love, serve, and enjoy him forever. At the same time, it would fill them with humiliation and self-abasement for all the injuries they have done to God, to Christ, to the holy Spirit, to saints, to sinners, and to themselves. Since you are men, why will you not seek to know and show yourselves men!

9. Since all men have rational powers and faculties, it is easy for God to give sinners a true knowledge of themselves, and humble them in the dust for living and acting as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. It is only for God to open the eyes of their mind and turn their attention to their own powers and faculties, and their abuse of them, and it will make them appear more vile than the brutes that perish. Such a view of themselves has led many to wish that God had not made them men. And it would be infinitely better for sinners, who employ all their rational powers in contending with their Maker, and opposing his interests and their own forever, if they were not men. Be entreated then to awake from your stupidity and show yourselves men. But if you despise this admonition, God has told you, that you alone must bear the tremendous consequences.

Whether sinners will hear, or forbear to hear, the text, we are to remember, is addressed to saints, and forbids them to be as the horse and mule, which have no understanding. If you will awake out of stupidity, God promises to guide you by his eye, and lead you to employ all your powers and faculties, gifts, and graces, in promoting his glory, the good of your fellow-creatures, and your own future and eternal felicity.

This is not only the dictate of reason, but the representation of scripture. God is more celebrated for his holiness, than for any other perfections of his nature. In celebrating his praise at the side of the Red Sea, the Israelites sang, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness?" And the heavenly hosts cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." God himself views his holiness as his supreme excellence. When Moses besought him to show him his glory, he answered, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee." Holiness is unquestionably the supreme excellence of the Supreme Being.

The angels of heaven stand next to the Deity in respect to their mental powers. But their perfect holiness is their supreme excellence, and gives them a beauty and worth superior to any unholy creatures. The beauties of holiness give Gabriel all his superiority to Lucifer the son of the morning. And it is equally true, that holiness is the supreme excellence of man. Though he was created but a little lower than the angels, and still possesses intellectual faculties superior to any created natures on earth, yet he never reaches his highest excellence, until he bears that moral image of God, which consists in righteousness and true holiness. Accordingly Solomon said, "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor;" and David pronounced the saints that are in the earth to be "the excellent, in whom was all his delight." Now where shall we look for the highest excellence, but among the highest and most excellent of beings? And if we can find nothing among them so excellent as holiness, then holiness is the most excellent thing to be found in the universe. If there be nothing in God, in angels, in men, in heaven, and in earth, so valuable and excellent as holiness, we must necessarily conclude, that it is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. This will further appear,

2. If we consider that holiness is that which God supremely requires in all his commands. When a certain man said to Christ, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The apostle also gives the same exposition of the divine commands, when he declares, that "love is the fulfilling of the law. All that the divine law requires is comprised in holy love. Holiness, therefore, is the whole duty and highest excellence of

That though sinners think they can, yet they cannot serve the Lord. I shall show,

I. That sinners generally think they can serve the Lord.

II. Why they think they can serve the Lord. And

III. Why they cannot serve him.

I. I am to show, that sinners generally think that they can serve the Lord. I say they generally think so, because they may think otherwise, and do sometimes, under certain circumstances, really think otherwise. But so long as God suffers them to walk in their own way, and pursue the objects which are the most agreeable to their natural hearts, they universally think that they can serve the Lord, whenever they find it convenient or important to serve him. Though they feel a present reluctance to every religious duty, yet they have no apprehension that this reluctance will ever arise so high, as to become unconquerable. They are very confident they can perform that service, which God requires them to perform, in order to obtain his pardoning mercy. This will appear from various considerations.

1. They sometimes secretly intend to serve the Lord. There are many, who have been religiously educated, who early think seriously about their spiritual concerns, and really intend to secure the salvation of their souls before they die. But they find so much reluctance to religious duties, and religious objects, that they totally neglect the service of God. They do not, however, renounce their good intentions in childhood, nor in youth, nor in riper years, but endeavor in some measure to cherish their serious purposes, especially when they hear serious things, or are placed in serious circumstances. And though some may grow very stupid, and grossly disobedient, yet even these have their serious intervals, when their serious intentions recur, and constrain them to re-resolve that they will carry their intention into effect, and sincerely serve the Lord. Now all such secret intentions of sinners necessarily imply, that they really think that they can serve the Lord, and that there is no insurmountable difficulty in the way. They imagine that they can lay aside their present aversion to religion, as easily as their aversion to many things, which they have laid aside. They have laid aside the follies and vanities of youth, for more manly and important pursuits. They have grown wiser, and mean to grow better, and finally devote themselves to the service of God. These secret intentions flow from a belief, that they can, whenever they shall set about it in earnest, perform every religious duty which God has enjoined. They live upon their good intentions, and self-sufficiency, which afford them much

peace, and hope, and confidence, while they are looking forward to long life and prosperity.

2. Sinners not only secretly intend, but secretly attempt to serve the Lord. Some attempt this in childhood; some attempt it in youth; some attempt it, while in the midst of their days, and engaged in the busy scenes of life; some attempt it, when they are sick, or exposed to danger; and some when they are awakened from their stupidity by the word or providence of God. But very few sinners, who enjoy the common means of grace, entirely neglect religious duties, in some stages and circumstances of their lives. Children and youth often read and pray in secret, as well as attend public worship. Many of riper years, who are ashamed to regard God or religion in public, do secretly call upon God, read his word, and strive to serve the Lord, and secure his favor. But no person, whether young or old, would ever attempt to serve God in secret, if he did not hope and expect to succeed. All sinners, who secretly attempt to serve God, manifest by their practice, that they think they can serve the Lord. Whenever sinners begin to perform religious duties, in any stage of life, they begin with self-confidence, that they are able, as well as desirous to serve God. How many sinners have lived from day to day, and from year to year, in the constant practice of seeking and striving to serve God in secret, with entire dependence upon their own strength, to do the whole of their duty? Though after they have once begun to seek God in secret, they often neglect seeking; yet they do not neglect, because they feel unable to serve God, but because they feel an aversion to spiritual and divine objects. For after they have neglected time after time, they will begin again, and strive with renewed and increased exertions. This plainly proves, that they think they can serve the Lord, notwithstanding any depravity or corruption of heart. They imagine, that nothing is wanting to conquer their depravity, but more arduous, vigorous, and persevering exertions; and these they think they can increase, until they have gained the victory, and obtained the favor of God, which is all they desire.

3. Sinners not only secretly intend, and attempt to serve God, but they often publicly declare, that they will serve him. This a multitude of sinners publicly declared to Joshua. They said, "Therefore will we also serve the Lord, for he is our God." The same said those at mount Sinai, who afterward fell and perished in the wilderness. In both these instances, there is reason to believe, that sinners were sincere in making their declarations. They undoubtedly meant to do what they said they would do.

They said they would serve the Lord; and they intended to do what God had required, and be obedient. But if this was true, they certainly thought they could obey and serve the Lord. Thousands and thousands of other sinners since have felt just as those Israelites did, and have made the same declarations, with the same kind and degree of sincerity. It is extremely natural for men in a state of nature, to think that they can serve God, whenever they shall think that their temporal or eternal good requires them to serve him. When sinners, at a solemn time, and under solemn circumstances, publicly declare that they will serve the Lord, we must believe, that they really think they are able to serve him. And this they have done in innumerable instances; which is a clear evidence that all secure sinners really think they can serve God. But we have still higher evidence of this. For,

4. Sinners have not only secretly intended to serve God, and secretly attempted to serve God, and publicly declared that they would serve God, but they have actually thought they did serve him. The scribes and pharisees in Christ's day, really thought they did serve God in sincerity and truth. They punctually observed all the divine commands, whether ceremonial or moral. Our Saviour, who knew their thoughts, reproved them by a parable, because "they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous." The pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, thanked God that he had served him perfectly. The amiable young man declared, that he had kept all the divine commands from his youth. And Paul said, that, while he was a sinner, he had thought himself, in respect to the law, blameless. It was the general opinion of sinners in Christ's day, that they did sincerely and perfectly serve God. Many sinners have ever since entertained the same high opinion of themselves. Thousands have thought, that they have sincerely obeyed the divine commands, while they were under the entire dominion of sin, and totally destitute of every gracious exercise. But it is impossible for sinners to think, that they really serve God, without thinking that they are able to serve him. Though sinners often complain of their inability to serve God, and say that they cannot serve him; yet their intentions, their exertions, their declarations, and their opinions of themselves, unite to demonstrate, that they do inwardly think they can serve God. They think just as sinners thought in the days of Moses, of Joshua, and of Christ. They really believe that they can, and often believe that they do serve God sincerely and acceptably. I now proceed to inquire,

II. Why sinners imagine they can serve the Lord. This

must be owing to some misapprehension of themselves, or ignorance of their own hearts. Though they believe they are sinful creatures, and naturally inclined to forget and forsake God, and disobey his holy commands; yet they do not believe they are altogether sinful, and wholly destitute of all good desires and intentions. Though they know that their hearts are deceitful; yet they do not know that they are desperately wicked, and absolutely unconquerable by their own exertions. They suppose that their desires to serve God are really good, though not so good as they ought to be, because they are too low and languid. This deficiency they often hope and expect that they shall some time or other make up, by more strong and vigorous desires and exertions. Accordingly, when they seriously set about seeking salvation, they become more and more ardent in their seekings and strivings for divine mercy. They do not know that the plague of their own hearts lies in their total selfishness, and entire regard to their own personal safety and happiness. And consequently they do not know, that the higher their desires, hopes, and fears rise, the more they become displeasing in the sight of God, who looks entirely on the heart, and abhors all selfish feelings. If they only knew the nature of their desires, intentions, resolutions, and exertions, they would no longer think that they could yield God a sincere and acceptable service. They would despair of conquering their depravity, by continually increasing it. But all secure and merely awakened sinners, are really ignorant of the nature of their moral depravity, and while they are ignorant of this, they verily think that they can and do serve God in some measure. They consider their good desires and actual attempts to serve God as acceptable in his sight. Thus the Israelites in Joshua's day, verily thought that they had served God, and would continue to serve him as long as they lived. And sinners at the present day, who are ignorant of their own hearts, entertain the same opinion of themselves. Like Paul in his state of ignorance and moral blindness, they flatter themselves, that it is an easy thing to serve God, while their hearts are far from him, and full of perfect selfishness. It now remains to show,

III. Why sinners cannot serve God. Joshua assigned the true reason to the Israelites. "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God." Holiness is the essence of God's moral character. He is pure and perfect love, which is pure and perfect holiness. All his moral perfections are comprised in love. He loves himself and all created beings according to their real worth and importance.

He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. He is the righteous Lord, who loves righteousness, and hates all unrighteousness in his unholy and sinful creatures. He is of purer eyes than to behold sin or iniquity in any form whatever. And for this reason he requires all men to be like himself, in all their views and feelings. He said to his people of old, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." And this precept the apostle tells us, is still binding upon all mankind. So that without holiness none can see, nor serve, nor enjoy God. This leads me to observe,

1. That sinners cannot serve God, because they cannot love him. God is perfectly holy, but they are perfectly unholy. God is perfectly benevolent, but they are perfectly sinful. God seeks the highest good of the universe supremely, but they seek their own good supremely. Their hearts are diametrically opposite to his heart, their desires to his desires, and their exertions to his exertions. And so long as this contrariety in their hearts exists, it is utterly impossible that they should love God for what he is in himself. They may love him for his favors, but this is only loving themselves. God's first and great command to every sinner is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." While sinners are destitute of love to God, it is impossible that they should perform any acceptable service to him. Their carnal minds are enmity against God, and more opposed to him, than to any other being or object in the universe. So far as they discern, they perfectly hate his holiness. And he knows it. Therefore he abhors and condemns all their external services. The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination in his sight, and he expressly forbids them to bring any more such vain oblations. Though sinners often imagine that they mean to serve God, and not themselves, yet God who knows their hearts perfectly, knows that they really seek their own good, and not his glory, and that they never can serve him, so long as their hearts are in perfect contrariety to his.

2. Sinners cannot serve God, because his laws are perfectly holy, like himself. The apostle says, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." God gave his commands from a holy motive, and he requires nothing but holiness in them. They are in all respects holy. And for this reason, unholy creatures cannot obey them. The apostle declares, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." No external obedience of totally depraved creatures, to a holy law, can be pleasing in his

sight. Hence says Solomon, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." It is morally impossible, that sinners should obey the divine laws, which they perfectly hate, both in their precepts and penalties. Christ obeyed his Father's commands out of love to them. He said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." And Paul said, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." So long as sinners do not love God, nor his laws, they cannot serve him. Besides,

3. Sinners cannot serve God, because they do not love his service. There is no part of his service that they love. They do not love to labor for him, nor to pray to him, nor to promote his interest. They love to labor for themselves, and to promote their own interests. They have a different object from that which God has, and which he requires them to have, in all they do. And whatever attempt they make to serve God, their ultimate design in it all, is, not to serve God, but to serve themselves. It is impossible, therefore, while they feel thus, that they should serve God, or do anything but what he abhors.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If sinners think that they can serve the Lord, then it is easy to see why so many live so easy and secure while they neglect to serve him Mankind commonly neglect to pursue what they suppose they can obtain just when they please. It is wholly owing to their confidence in their own power to serve God whenever they think it is necessary, that they neglect it, and live so easy in their neglect. For whenever they imagine that they shall want time, or opportunity, or disposition, to serve God, they are in distress. No one can look upon himself as in immediate danger of perdition, without being affected by it. Hence sickness often throws sinners into distress, and they cry out in great agony of mind, lest they should now die in their sins and lose their souls. Hence conviction of the plague of their own hearts fills them with distress, and they tremble with fearful apprehensions of the wrath of God. They do not find it so easy to serve the Lord as they expected; and they fear that the time of their serving him will soon be past, and they shall be his enemies, and have him for their enemy forever.

2. If sinners are mistaken in thinking that they can serve God, then it is very important that their mistake should be removed, and that they should be made to see and feel that they

cannot serve God, and to know that the reason is because he is a holy God, to whom their whole hearts are opposed. If sinners think they can serve God, because they are ignorant of their own hearts, then it is of great importance that the *nature* of their total depravity should be clearly and fully laid open before them, though they are ever so averse to seeing it. Sinners can struggle a great while with a sense of their sinfulness and exposedness to divine wrath, if they be not thoroughly convinced of their total moral impotency to break the cords of their iniquity, and flee from the wrath to come. It is one of the last things of which sinners are convinced, that all the struggles and strivings of the carnal mind are utterly in vain, and that while they are in the flesh, they cannot please God, and appease his wrath. But of this the Spirit of God convinces sinners before he changes their hearts.

3. If the inability of sinners to serve God arises from the contrariety of their hearts to the heart of God, then it is altogether sinful and inexcusable. They ought to love God and serve him, because he is holy and worthy to be loved and served. But this is the reason why they cannot, and the only reason. Their inability therefore is their sin; and the more unable they are to love God for his holiness, the more inexcusable and sinful they are; because all their inability arises from the utter aversion of their hearts to that which is good.

of its Creator, which all men are capable of seeing and believing. All men in all parts of the world are capable of tracing effects to their causes, and by this mode of reasoning, of demonstrating the existence of their Maker. So the apostle expressly asserts: "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they (the heathen) are without excuse," who deny his existence. The world bears so many marks and signatures of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, that men who possess the power of reasoning and tracing effects to their causes, are utterly inexcusable if they do not see and believe that it owes its existence to a wise, powerful, benevolent Cause. Voltaire, and the other atheistical French philosophers, were extremely criminal in denying the existence of the Creator and Governor of the world; and so are all the atheists at this day. All men in all other cases reason from effects to their causes. Who can examine any piece of machinery without discovering the hand and the ingenuity of the artificer? But there is unspeakably more power, more wisdom, and more goodness displayed in the works of creation, than ever have been or can be displayed in the works of art. And we have higher evidence of the existence and perfections of God, than of any other existence, but our own.

5. Since men are endowed with rational powers, it is absurd for any to deny the truth and divinity of the Bible. It bears the image and superscription of the Deity. Its precepts and prohibitions, its promises and threatenings, and the wise and gracious scheme of redemption which it unfolds, all unitedly carry conviction to every man's reason and conscience, that it is the word of God and not the word of men. It must have come from God, or from false or wicked impostors. But could such men write such a book as the Bible? Or if they could, would they have written such a book? It is just such a book as mankind need, and just such a book as they might have reasonably expected God would give them, if he had been pleased to reveal his mind and will to them. And it comes with just such credentials as are best adapted to gain belief. If men would examine this sacred volume rationally and impartially, must they not discover plain and incontestable marks of its divine original? But on the other hand, what marks can they discover of its coming from false and wicked impostors? What motives could they have in writing a book, which represents God as the greatest and best of beings, which represents good men as the excellent of the earth, and which represents bad

men in the most odious colors? It becomes Deists to show themselves men, and exercise their noble rational powers in examining the authenticity and inspiration of the holy scriptures. They have no more right to disbelieve, without reason, than others have to believe, without reason. They have no right to despise and reject the Bible without reading it through, as Thomas Paine said he did, and as many other novices in infidelity probably do. The Bible claims to come from God, and men are under moral obligation to examine its claims rationally and impartially; and if they do this, we are not concerned about the consequence.

6. Since men possess rational and moral powers, it is absurd and criminal for any to deny the distinction between virtue and vice. This distinction is founded in the nature of things, and every man has a conscience or moral faculty, by which he is capable of seeing the distinction between right and wrong, selfishness and benevolence, virtue and vice. But this distinction has often been denied by those who discard divine Revelation. They have justified the grossest vices and immoralities, and condemned humility and other Christian graces and moral virtues, as human weaknesses. They say that what is called virtue by one nation is called vice by another, from which they pretend to conclude, that there is no essential distinction between them; but this is very superficial reasoning, because it is well known that every nation calls some things right and some things wrong, some things good and some things evil, and some things virtuous and some things vicious; which proves that all nations do in fact see and acknowledge the distinction between virtue and vice. Though they differ in respect to some particular things, yet that difference may be accounted for, by tradition, or education, or moral blindness. Some in the prophet's day were involved in such moral ignorance, that they called good evil and evil good, put darkness for light and light for darkness, and put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. And this is the case in every nation at the present day. Yet they admire and applaud justice, honesty, and liberality; and condemn lying, stealing, murder, and other crimes and vices. To deny the distinction between virtue and vice is contrary to reason, conscience, and the common sense of all mankind, and must be owing to moral ignorance and the criminal blindness of the heart.

7. Since men possess rational and moral powers of mind, they have no right to disbelieve the immortality of the soul. This some of the wisest pagan philosophers denied. Even Cicero expressed his doubts whether the soul would exist after

death. Most of the Deists in Europe, if not in America, are what are called *mortal* Deists, and maintain that the soul dies with the body. But as men, they have no ground for this opinion. Their noble, moral, intellectual powers, which constitute them moral agents and accountable beings, afford them a strong presumption, that they shall continue to exist after death, and be rewarded, or punished for their deeds done in the body. It is true, indeed, this evidence of the immortality of their souls does not amount to strict demonstration, but it does amount to the highest probability, and lays them under obligation to believe their accountability and future existence, and to prepare for it. It is absurd and criminal for men to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," and cease to exist. Reason and conscience give all men a presentiment that they shall exist in a happy or miserable state after death. It becomes them as men, who possess noble intellectual powers and faculties, to show themselves men, and duly prepare for all that awaits them in every future stage of their existence. And it must be extremely dangerous and criminal, to employ all their abilities to convince themselves and others, that they may safely live and die, like the brutes that perish. Hence,

8. This subject teaches the vast importance of self-knowledge. A pagan could say, the precept "Know thyself," came from heaven. The apostle puts the solemn question to Christians, "Know ye not your own selves?" All men are capable of knowing their own selves, and it must be folly and absurdity in the extreme for any men, and especially for Christians, and even for heathen to be ignorant of themselves. But no knowledge has been so much neglected, by the learned and unlearned, the wise and unwise, the great, the rich, and the prosperous, as self-knowledge. Men have been inquisitive in all ages, and spent much time, and thought, and expense, to acquire a large stock of every species of knowledge respecting the improvements which mankind have made in arts, sciences, and literature. But while they have gained the knowledge of these things, they have been grossly ignorant of themselves. Every man carries a little world within himself, by knowing which he might know all the rest of mankind, and form a just estimate of the whole world and of all who live in it. For "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." By knowing his own intellectual powers, a man may know the intellectual powers of all men. They all have the same mental powers, though not in the same vigor and activity. They all have the same native corruption of heart, which leads them to forget and forsake God, to pursue lying vanities, and to neglect

their own eternal good and the eternal good of others. When any man becomes acquainted with his own heart, and is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, he knows more about God, about himself, about his fellow-men, about the world in which they live, the objects which they pursue, and the effects and consequences of their living here and hereafter, than he could learn by merely searching the history of the whole world. If men would only seek after self-knowledge, which is so easy to attain, it would fill their hearts with gratitude to God for making them wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven; for giving them such a noble, rational, and immortal existence; for sending his Son to save them from their guilty and lost condition; for doing them so much good, while they are evil, and abusing his favors; and for preparing them to know, love, serve, and enjoy him forever. At the same time, it would fill them with humiliation and self-abasement for all the injuries they have done to God, to Christ, to the holy Spirit, to saints, to sinners, and to themselves. Since you are men, why will you not seek to know and show yourselves men!

9. Since all men have rational powers and faculties, it is easy for God to give sinners a true knowledge of themselves, and humble them in the dust for living and acting as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. It is only for God to open the eyes of their mind and turn their attention to their own powers and faculties, and their abuse of them, and it will make them appear more vile than the brutes that perish. Such a view of themselves has led many to wish that God had not made them men. And it would be infinitely better for sinners, who employ all their rational powers in contending with their Maker, and opposing his interests and their own forever, if they were not men. Be entreated then to awake from your stupidity and show yourselves men. But if you despise this admonition, God has told you, that you alone must bear the tremendous consequences.

Whether sinners will hear, or forbear to hear, the text, we are to remember, is addressed to saints, and forbids them to be as the horse and mule, which have no understanding. If you will awake out of stupidity, God promises to guide you by his eye, and lead you to employ all your powers and faculties, gifts, and graces, in promoting his glory, the good of your fellow-creatures, and your own future and eternal felicity.

SERMON XXV.

HOLINESS, INTRINSICALLY AND SUPREMELY EXCELLENT AND VALUABLE.

"For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it."—Prov. viii. 11.

Every one who has read the book of Proverbs with any attention, must have observed, that Solomon means by wisdom holiness, and by folly sin; by a wise man a saint, and by a fool a sinner. This may be sufficiently illustrated by two or three instances. In the last verse of the third chapter, he says, "The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools." Who can doubt, whether by the wise he means saints, or by fools sinners? In the ninth chapter, and tenth verse, he says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" by which he means to assert, that true wisdom is true piety, or real holiness. He says again, (Prov. xxvi. 11,) "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." By the folly of a fool, he here means the sin of a sinner. If we may understand Solomon according to his peculiar and uniform phraseology, we may safely conclude that by wisdom in the text, he means moral goodness, or true holiness. This gives us a right to drop the metaphor, and read the text in this form, Holiness is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. It is hard to conceive how the intrinsic worth and excellence of holiness could be painted in brighter colors than by comparing it to rubies, the richest and most beautiful objects in nature. Solomon knew the essential difference between natural and moral excellence, and therefore meant to represent holiness, which is, in its own nature, morally excellent, as far superior to rubies, or any natural object, which has no moral quality or intrinsic value. He evidently intended to express in the strongest terms this important truth,

That though sinners think they can, yet they cannot serve the Lord. I shall show,

I. That sinners generally think they can serve the Lord.

II. Why they think they can serve the Lord. And

III. Why they cannot serve him.

I. I am to show, that sinners generally think that they can serve the Lord. I say they generally think so, because they may think otherwise, and do sometimes, under certain circumstances, really think otherwise. But so long as God suffers them to walk in their own way, and pursue the objects which are the most agreeable to their natural hearts, they universally think that they can serve the Lord, whenever they find it convenient or important to serve him. Though they feel a present reluctance to every religious duty, yet they have no apprehension that this reluctance will ever arise so high, as to become unconquerable. They are very confident they can perform that service, which God requires them to perform, in order to obtain his pardoning mercy. This will appear from various considerations.

1. They sometimes secretly intend to serve the Lord. There are many, who have been religiously educated, who early think seriously about their spiritual concerns, and really intend to secure the salvation of their souls before they die. But they find so much reluctance to religious duties, and religious objects, that they totally neglect the service of God. They do not, however, renounce their good intentions in childhood, nor in youth, nor in riper years, but endeavor in some measure to cherish their serious purposes, especially when they hear serious things, or are placed in serious circumstances. And though some may grow very stupid, and grossly disobedient, yet even these have their serious intervals, when their serious intentions recur, and constrain them to re-resolve that they will carry their intention into effect, and sincerely serve the Lord. Now all such secret intentions of sinners necessarily imply, that they really think that they can serve the Lord, and that there is no insurmountable difficulty in the way. They imagine that they can lay aside their present aversion to religion, as easily as their aversion to many things, which they have laid aside. They have laid aside the follies and vanities of youth, for more manly and important pursuits. They have grown wiser, and mean to grow better, and finally devote themselves to the service of God. These secret intentions flow from a belief, that they can, whenever they shall set about it in earnest, perform every religious duty which God has enjoined. They live upon their good intentions, and self-sufficiency, which afford them much

peace, and hope, and confidence, while they are looking forward to long life and prosperity.

2. Sinners not only secretly intend, but secretly attempt to serve the Lord. Some attempt this in childhood; some attempt it in youth; some attempt it, while in the midst of their days, and engaged in the busy scenes of life; some attempt it, when they are sick, or exposed to danger; and some when they are awakened from their stupidity by the word or providence of God. But very few sinners, who enjoy the common means of grace, entirely neglect religious duties, in some stages and circumstances of their lives. Children and youth often read and pray in secret, as well as attend public worship. Many of riper years, who are ashamed to regard God or religion in public, do secretly call upon God, read his word, and strive to serve the Lord, and secure his favor. But no person, whether young or old, would ever attempt to serve God in secret, if he did not hope and expect to succeed. All sinners, who secretly attempt to serve God, manifest by their practice, that they think they can serve the Lord. Whenever sinners begin to perform religious duties, in any stage of life, they begin with self-confidence, that they are able, as well as desirous to serve God. How many sinners have lived from day to day, and from year to year, in the constant practice of seeking and striving to serve God in secret, with entire dependence upon their own strength, to do the whole of their duty? Though after they have once begun to seek God in secret, they often neglect seeking; yet they do not neglect, because they feel unable to serve God, but because they feel an aversion to spiritual and divine objects. For after they have neglected time after time, they will begin again, and strive with renewed and increased exertions. This plainly proves, that they think they can serve the Lord, notwithstanding any depravity or corruption of heart. They imagine, that nothing is wanting to conquer their depravity, but more arduous, vigorous, and persevering exertions; and these they think they can increase, until they have gained the victory, and obtained the favor of God, which is all they desire.

3. Sinners not only secretly intend, and attempt to serve God, but they often publicly declare, that they will serve him. This a multitude of sinners publicly declared to Joshua. They said, "Therefore will we also serve the Lord, for he is our God." The same said those at mount Sinai, who afterward fell and perished in the wilderness. In both these instances, there is reason to believe, that sinners were sincere in making their declarations. They undoubtedly meant to do what they said they would do.

They said they would serve the Lord; and they intended to do what God had required, and be obedient. But if this was true, they certainly thought they could obey and serve the Lord. Thousands and thousands of other sinners since have felt just as those Israelites did, and have made the same declarations, with the same kind and degree of sincerity. It is extremely natural for men in a state of nature, to think that they can serve God, whenever they shall think that their temporal or eternal good requires them to serve him. When sinners, at a solemn time, and under solemn circumstances, publicly declare that they will serve the Lord, we must believe, that they really think they are able to serve him. And this they have done in innumerable instances; which is a clear evidence that all secure sinners really think they can serve God. But we have still higher evidence of this. For,

4. Sinners have not only secretly intended to serve God, and secretly attempted to serve God, and publicly declared that they would serve God, but they have actually thought they did serve him. The scribes and pharisees in Christ's day, really thought they did serve God in sincerity and truth. They punctually observed all the divine commands, whether ceremonial or moral. Our Saviour, who knew their thoughts, reproved them by a parable, because "they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous." The pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, thanked God that he had served him perfectly. The amiable young man declared, that he had kept all the divine commands from his youth. And Paul said, that, while he was a sinner, he had thought himself, in respect to the law, blameless. It was the general opinion of sinners in Christ's day, that they did sincerely and perfectly serve God. Many sinners have ever since entertained the same high opinion of themselves. Thousands have thought, that they have sincerely obeyed the divine commands, while they were under the entire dominion of sin, and totally destitute of every gracious exercise. But it is impossible for sinners to think, that they really serve God, without thinking that they are able to serve him. Though sinners often complain of their inability to serve God, and say that they cannot serve him; yet their intentions, their exertions, their declarations, and their opinions of themselves, unite to demonstrate, that they do inwardly think they can serve God. They think just as sinners thought in the days of Moses, of Joshua, and of Christ. They really believe that they can, and often believe that they do serve God sincerely and acceptably. I now proceed to inquire,

II. Why sinners imagine they can serve the Lord. This

must be owing to some misapprehension of themselves, or ignorance of their own hearts. Though they believe they are sinful creatures, and naturally inclined to forget and forsake God, and disobey his holy commands; yet they do not believe they are altogether sinful, and wholly destitute of all good desires and intentions. Though they know that their hearts are deceitful; yet they do not know that they are desperately wicked, and absolutely unconquerable by their own exertions. They suppose that their desires to serve God are really good, though not so good as they ought to be, because they are too low and languid. This deficiency they often hope and expect that they shall some time or other make up, by more strong and vigorous desires and exertions. Accordingly, when they seriously set about seeking salvation, they become more and more ardent in their seekings and strivings for divine mercy. They do not know that the plague of their own hearts lies in their total selfishness, and entire regard to their own personal safety and happiness. And consequently they do not know, that the higher their desires, hopes, and fears rise, the more they become displeasing in the sight of God, who looks entirely on the heart, and abhors all selfish feelings. If they only knew the nature of their desires, intentions, resolutions, and exertions, they would no longer think that they could yield God a sincere and acceptable service. They would despair of conquering their depravity, by continually increasing it. But all secure and merely awakened sinners, are really ignorant of the nature of their moral depravity, and while they are ignorant of this, they verily think that they can and do serve God in some measure. They consider their good desires and actual attempts to serve God as acceptable in his sight. Thus the Israelites in Joshua's day, verily thought that they had served God, and would continue to serve him as long as they lived. And sinners at the present day, who are ignorant of their own hearts, entertain the same opinion of themselves. Like Paul in his state of ignorance and moral blindness, they flatter themselves, that it is an easy thing to serve God, while their hearts are far from him, and full of perfect selfishness. It now remains to show,

III. Why sinners cannot serve God. Joshua assigned the true reason to the Israelites. "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God." Holiness is the essence of God's moral character. He is pure and perfect love, which is pure and perfect holiness. All his moral perfections are comprised in love. He loves himself and all created beings according to their real worth and importance.

He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. He is the righteous Lord, who loves righteousness, and hates all unrighteousness in his unholy and sinful creatures. He is of purer eyes than to behold sin or iniquity in any form whatever. And for this reason he requires all men to be like himself, in all their views and feelings. He said to his people of old, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." And this precept the apostle tells us, is still binding upon all mankind. So that without holiness none can see, nor serve, nor enjoy God. This leads me to observe,

1. That sinners cannot serve God, because they cannot love him. God is perfectly holy, but they are perfectly unholy. God is perfectly benevolent, but they are perfectly sinful. God seeks the highest good of the universe supremely, but they seek their own good supremely. Their hearts are diametrically opposite to his heart, their desires to his desires, and their exertions to his exertions. And so long as this contrariety in their hearts exists, it is utterly impossible that they should love God for what he is in himself. They may love him for his favors, but this is only loving themselves. God's first and great command to every sinner is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." While sinners are destitute of love to God, it is impossible that they should perform any acceptable service to him. Their carnal minds are enmity against God, and more opposed to him, than to any other being or object in the universe. So far as they discern, they perfectly hate his holiness. And he knows it. Therefore he abhors and condemns all their external services. The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination in his sight, and he expressly forbids them to bring any more such vain oblations. Though sinners often imagine that they mean to serve God, and not themselves, yet God who knows their hearts perfectly, knows that they really seek their own good, and not his glory, and that they never can serve him, so long as their hearts are in perfect contrariety to his.

2. Sinners cannot serve God, because his laws are perfectly holy, like himself. The apostle says, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." God gave his commands from a holy motive, and he requires nothing but holiness in them. They are in all respects holy. And for this reason, unholy creatures cannot obey them. The apostle declares, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." No external obedience of totally depraved creatures, to a holy law, can be pleasing in his

sight. Hence says Solomon, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." It is morally impossible, that sinners should obey the divine laws, which they perfectly hate, both in their precepts and penalties. Christ obeyed his Father's commands out of love to them. He said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." And Paul said, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." So long as sinners do not love God, nor his laws, they cannot serve him. Besides,

3. Sinners cannot serve God, because they do not love his service. There is no part of his service that they love. They do not love to labor for him, nor to pray to him, nor to promote his interest. They love to labor for themselves, and to promote their own interests. They have a different object from that which God has, and which he requires them to have, in all they do. And whatever attempt they make to serve God, their ultimate design in it all, is, not to serve God, but to serve themselves. It is impossible, therefore, while they feel thus, that they should serve God, or do anything but what he abhors.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If sinners think that they can serve the Lord, then it is easy to see why so many live so easy and secure while they neglect to serve him Mankind commonly neglect to pursue what they suppose they can obtain just when they please. It is wholly owing to their confidence in their own power to serve God whenever they think it is necessary, that they neglect it, and live so easy in their neglect. For whenever they imagine that they shall want time, or opportunity, or disposition, to serve God, they are in distress. No one can look upon himself as in immediate danger of perdition, without being affected by it. Hence sickness often throws sinners into distress, and they cry out in great agony of mind, lest they should now die in their sins and lose their souls. Hence conviction of the plague of their own hearts fills them with distress, and they tremble with fearful apprehensions of the wrath of God. They do not find it so easy to serve the Lord as they expected; and they fear that the time of their serving him will soon be past, and they shall be his enemies, and have him for their enemy forever.

2. If sinners are mistaken in thinking that they can serve God, then it is very important that their mistake should be removed, and that they should be made to see and feel that they

cannot serve God, and to know that the reason is because he is a holy God, to whom their whole hearts are opposed. If sinners think they can serve God, because they are ignorant of their own hearts, then it is of great importance that the *nature* of their total depravity should be clearly and fully laid open before them, though they are ever so averse to seeing it. Sinners can struggle a great while with a sense of their sinfulness and exposedness to divine wrath, if they be not thoroughly convinced of their total moral impotency to break the cords of their iniquity, and flee from the wrath to come. It is one of the last things of which sinners are convinced, that all the struggles and strivings of the carnal mind are utterly in vain, and that while they are in the flesh, they cannot please God, and appease his wrath. But of this the Spirit of God convinces sinners before he changes their hearts.

3. If the inability of sinners to serve God arises from the contrariety of their hearts to the heart of God, then it is altogether sinful and inexcusable. They ought to love God and serve him, because he is holy and worthy to be loved and served. But this is the reason why they cannot, and the only reason. Their inability therefore is their sin; and the more unable they are to love God for his holiness, the more inexcusable and sinful they are; because all their inability arises from the utter aversion of their hearts to that which is good.

death. Most of the Deists in Europe, if not in America, are what are called *mortal* Deists, and maintain that the soul dies with the body. But as men, they have no ground for this opinion. Their noble, moral, intellectual powers, which constitute them moral agents and accountable beings, afford them a strong presumption, that they shall continue to exist after death, and be rewarded, or punished for their deeds done in the body. It is true, indeed, this evidence of the immortality of their souls does not amount to strict demonstration, but it does amount to the highest probability, and lays them under obligation to believe their accountability and future existence, and to prepare for it. It is absurd and criminal for men to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," and cease to exist. Reason and conscience give all men a presentiment that they shall exist in a happy or miserable state after death. It becomes them as men, who possess noble intellectual powers and faculties, to show themselves men, and duly prepare for all that awaits them in every future stage of their existence. And it must be extremely dangerous and criminal, to employ all their abilities to convince themselves and others, that they may safely live and die, like the brutes that perish. Hence,

8. This subject teaches the vast importance of self-knowledge. A pagan could say, the precept "Know thyself," came from heaven. The apostle puts the solemn question to Christians, "Know ye not your own selves?" All men are capable of knowing their own selves, and it must be folly and absurdity in the extreme for any men, and especially for Christians, and even for heathen to be ignorant of themselves. But no knowledge has been so much neglected, by the learned and unlearned, the wise and unwise, the great, the rich, and the prosperous, as self-knowledge. Men have been inquisitive in all ages, and spent much time, and thought, and expense, to acquire a large stock of every species of knowledge respecting the improvements which mankind have made in arts, sciences, and literature. But while they have gained the knowledge of these things, they have been grossly ignorant of themselves. Every man carries a little world within himself, by knowing which he might know all the rest of mankind, and form a just estimate of the whole world and of all who live in it. For "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." By knowing his own intellectual powers, a man may know the intellectual powers of all men. They all have the same mental powers, though not in the same vigor and activity. They all have the same native corruption of heart, which leads them to forget and forsake God, to pursue lying vanities, and to neglect

their own eternal good and the eternal good of others. When any man becomes acquainted with his own heart, and is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, he knows more about God, about himself, about his fellow-men, about the world in which they live, the objects which they pursue, and the effects and consequences of their living here and hereafter, than he could learn by merely searching the history of the whole world. If men would only seek after self-knowledge, which is so easy to attain, it would fill their hearts with gratitude to God for making them wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven; for giving them such a noble, rational, and immortal existence; for sending his Son to save them from their guilty and lost condition; for doing them so much good, while they are evil, and abusing his favors; and for preparing them to know, love, serve, and enjoy him forever. At the same time, it would fill them with humiliation and self-abasement for all the injuries they have done to God, to Christ, to the holy Spirit, to saints, to sinners, and to themselves. Since you are men, why will you not seek to know and show yourselves men!

9. Since all men have rational powers and faculties, it is easy for God to give sinners a true knowledge of themselves, and humble them in the dust for living and acting as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. It is only for God to open the eyes of their mind and turn their attention to their own powers and faculties, and their abuse of them, and it will make them appear more vile than the brutes that perish. Such a view of themselves has led many to wish that God had not made them men. And it would be infinitely better for sinners, who employ all their rational powers in contending with their Maker, and opposing his interests and their own forever, if they were not men. Be entreated then to awake from your stupidity and show yourselves men. But if you despise this admonition, God has told you, that you alone must bear the tremendous consequences.

Whether sinners will hear, or forbear to hear, the text, we are to remember, is addressed to saints, and forbids them to be as the horse and mule, which have no understanding. If you will awake out of stupidity, God promises to guide you by his eye, and lead you to employ all your powers and faculties, gifts, and graces, in promoting his glory, the good of your fellow-creatures, and your own future and eternal felicity.

which are displeasing to God, grievous to his friends, and destructive to themselves. They may know beforehand, that they will sooner or later blame themselves, and hate and despise one another, for their conduct. The sooner, therefore, that their unions and combinations are dissolved, the better for them, and for others.

7. If holiness is, in its own nature, morally and supremely excellent; and sin, in its own nature, morally evil and odious; then we see why God disapproves and condemns the desires and prayers of sinners. They sometimes desire and pray for holiness with great ardor and importunity. But God, who knows their selfish hearts, knows that they do not desire holiness for its own sake, nor hate sin for its own sake. They only desire happiness and hate misery, and pray for holiness merely to escape misery and obtain happiness. This is making happiness the greatest good, and not holiness; and misery the greatest evil, and not sin. Their prayers, therefore, are in direct contradiction to scripture, reason, and conscience, and of course must be odious and abominable in the sight of the righteous Lord, who loves righteousness, holiness, and benevolence, but hates sin, iniquity, and selfishness. And when sinners are under genuine convictions, they have the same view of their prayers.

That though sinners think they can, yet they cannot serve the Lord. I shall show,

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SERMON XXV.

HOLINESS, INTRINSICALLY AND SUPREMELY EXCELLENT AND VALUABLE.

"For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it."—Prov. viii. 11.

Every one who has read the book of Proverbs with any attention, must have observed, that Solomon means by wisdom holiness, and by folly sin; by a wise man a saint, and by a fool a sinner. This may be sufficiently illustrated by two or three instances. In the last verse of the third chapter, he says, "The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools." Who can doubt, whether by the wise he means saints, or by fools sinners? In the ninth chapter, and tenth verse, he says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" by which he means to assert, that true wisdom is true piety, or real holiness. He says again, (Prov. xxvi. 11,) "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." By the folly of a fool, he here means the sin of a sinner. If we may understand Solomon according to his peculiar and uniform phraseology, we may safely conclude that by wisdom in the text, he means moral goodness, or true holiness. This gives us a right to drop the metaphor, and read the text in this form, Holiness is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. It is hard to conceive how the intrinsic worth and excellence of holiness could be painted in brighter colors than by comparing it to rubies, the richest and most beautiful objects in nature. Solomon knew the essential difference between natural and moral excellence, and therefore meant to represent holiness, which is, in its own nature, morally excellent, as far superior to rubies, or any natural object, which has no moral quality or intrinsic value. He evidently intended to express in the strongest terms this important truth,

That holiness is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. I shall endeavor,

I. To explain this general observation. And

II. To support it.

In the first place, it seems necessary to explain what is to be understood by holiness being, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. Holiness is distinct from knowledge, for they often exist separately. It is equally evident that holiness is distinct from happiness, for these are not always united. Holiness is much more rare in this world, than knowledge and happiness. These, to a considerable degree, are very common among mankind. Men may arrive at great eminence in knowledge, while totally destitute of holiness. This belongs to the heart, and not to the understanding. It may be termed goodness, rather than greatness. "God is love:" and pure, disinterested love is the sum and comprehension of all holiness in every morally virtuous being. This holy love is, in its own nature, truly valuable and excellent, by which is meant, that it is, in itself considered, and separate from all its fruits and effects, really virtuous and valuable. Some things are valuable only as means, and not as ends; but others are valuable as ends, and not as means. Bread and other kinds of food are valuable as means to preserve life; and good books are valuable as means to promote knowledge. But neither bread nor books would have any value, if the one did not feed the body, and the other feed the mind. They are not, therefore, valuable in their own nature. But holiness is morally excellent in its own nature, aside from all its happy effects and consequences. And as it is intrinsically excellent, so it is supremely valuable. There is nothing in the universe equal to it in worth and importance. It is more precious than rubies; "and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." It is the one thing needful. But as this is a subject of great importance, and one upon which there is a diversity of opinions, I shall endeavor to make it appear, as proposed,

II. That holiness is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. It may be observed,

1. That holiness is the supreme excellence of the most excellent beings. God is possessed of the highest natural perfections and excellencies. His existence is independent, and his power, knowledge, and wisdom are unlimited. These constitute his superlative greatness. But his holiness surpasses his greatness, and spreads a superior excellence and glory over all his other attributes. There is infinitely more worth and excellence in his holiness, than in all his natural perfections united.

death. Most of the Deists in Europe, if not in America, are what are called *mortal* Deists, and maintain that the soul dies with the body. But as men, they have no ground for this opinion. Their noble, moral, intellectual powers, which constitute them moral agents and accountable beings, afford them a strong presumption, that they shall continue to exist after death, and be rewarded, or punished for their deeds done in the body. It is true, indeed, this evidence of the immortality of their souls does not amount to strict demonstration, but it does amount to the highest probability, and lays them under obligation to believe their accountability and future existence, and to prepare for it. It is absurd and criminal for men to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," and cease to exist. Reason and conscience give all men a presentiment that they shall exist in a happy or miserable state after death. It becomes them as men, who possess noble intellectual powers and faculties, to show themselves men, and duly prepare for all that awaits them in every future stage of their existence. And it must be extremely dangerous and criminal, to employ all their abilities to convince themselves and others, that they may safely live and die, like the brutes that perish. Hence,

8. This subject teaches the vast importance of self-knowledge. A pagan could say, the precept "Know thyself," came from heaven. The apostle puts the solemn question to Christians, "Know ye not your own selves?" All men are capable of knowing their own selves, and it must be folly and absurdity in the extreme for any men, and especially for Christians, and even for heathen to be ignorant of themselves. But no knowledge has been so much neglected, by the learned and unlearned, the wise and unwise, the great, the rich, and the prosperous, as self-knowledge. Men have been inquisitive in all ages, and spent much time, and thought, and expense, to acquire a large stock of every species of knowledge respecting the improvements which mankind have made in arts, sciences, and literature. But while they have gained the knowledge of these things, they have been grossly ignorant of themselves. Every man carries a little world within himself, by knowing which he might know all the rest of mankind, and form a just estimate of the whole world and of all who live in it. For "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." By knowing his own intellectual powers, a man may know the intellectual powers of all men. They all have the same mental powers, though not in the same vigor and activity. They all have the same native corruption of heart, which leads them to forget and forsake God, to pursue lying vanities, and to neglect

their own eternal good and the eternal good of others. When any man becomes acquainted with his own heart, and is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, he knows more about God, about himself, about his fellow-men, about the world in which they live, the objects which they pursue, and the effects and consequences of their living here and hereafter, than he could learn by merely searching the history of the whole world. If men would only seek after self-knowledge, which is so easy to attain, it would fill their hearts with gratitude to God for making them wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven; for giving them such a noble, rational, and immortal existence; for sending his Son to save them from their guilty and lost condition; for doing them so much good, while they are evil, and abusing his favors; and for preparing them to know, love, serve, and enjoy him forever. At the same time, it would fill them with humiliation and self-abasement for all the injuries they have done to God, to Christ, to the holy Spirit, to saints, to sinners, and to themselves. Since you are men, why will you not seek to know and show yourselves men!

9. Since all men have rational powers and faculties, it is easy for God to give sinners a true knowledge of themselves, and humble them in the dust for living and acting as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. It is only for God to open the eyes of their mind and turn their attention to their own powers and faculties, and their abuse of them, and it will make them appear more vile than the brutes that perish. Such a view of themselves has led many to wish that God had not made them men. And it would be infinitely better for sinners, who employ all their rational powers in contending with their Maker, and opposing his interests and their own forever, if they were not men. Be entreated then to awake from your stupidity and show yourselves men. But if you despise this admonition, God has told you, that you alone must bear the tremendous consequences.

Whether sinners will hear, or forbear to hear, the text, we are to remember, is addressed to saints, and forbids them to be as the horse and mule, which have no understanding. If you will awake out of stupidity, God promises to guide you by his eye, and lead you to employ all your powers and faculties, gifts, and graces, in promoting his glory, the good of your fellow-creatures, and your own future and eternal felicity.

SERMON XXIV.

MORAL INABILITY OF SINNERS.

"And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God."—Joshua, xxiv. 19.

Immediately after the death of Moses, Joshua took the charge of the children of Israel, and conducted them, through hosts of enemies whom he subdued, to the land of promise. And though he was then eighty-five years old, yet he continued to govern the nation for twenty-five years longer. During this period, he divided the land among the twelve tribes, and directed all their civil and religious concerns with great wisdom and integrity. But in the course of nearly thirty years, many of the people died, and others lost the serious impressions which the dangers and trials of the wilderness had made upon their minds, while a younger generation rose up, who had seen less, and known less of the God of their fathers. These causes Joshua foresaw would naturally bring on a religious declension, which he greatly deprecated. Deeply impressed with their danger and his own speedy departure, he called all the people together, and rehearsed their history from the beginning. And in the review of the divine goodness towards them, he exhorted them to fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth; but as for himself and his household, they would serve the Lord. To this the people replied, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for the Lord our God, he it is that brought us up, and our fathers, out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed.—Therefore will we also serve the Lord; for he is our God. And Joshua said unto the people, ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God." These words plainly teach us,

That though sinners think they can, yet they cannot serve the Lord. I shall show,

I. That sinners generally think they can serve the Lord.

II. Why they think they can serve the Lord. And

III. Why they cannot serve him.

I. I am to show, that sinners generally think that they can serve the Lord. I say they generally think so, because they may think otherwise, and do sometimes, under certain circumstances, really think otherwise. But so long as God suffers them to walk in their own way, and pursue the objects which are the most agreeable to their natural hearts, they universally think that they can serve the Lord, whenever they find it convenient or important to serve him. Though they feel a present reluctance to every religious duty, yet they have no apprehension that this reluctance will ever arise so high, as to become unconquerable. They are very confident they can perform that service, which God requires them to perform, in order to obtain his pardoning mercy. This will appear from various considerations.

1. They sometimes secretly intend to serve the Lord. There are many, who have been religiously educated, who early think seriously about their spiritual concerns, and really intend to secure the salvation of their souls before they die. But they find so much reluctance to religious duties, and religious objects, that they totally neglect the service of God. They do not, however, renounce their good intentions in childhood, nor in youth, nor in riper years, but endeavor in some measure to cherish their serious purposes, especially when they hear serious things, or are placed in serious circumstances. And though some may grow very stupid, and grossly disobedient, yet even these have their serious intervals, when their serious intentions recur, and constrain them to re-resolve that they will carry their intention into effect, and sincerely serve the Lord. Now all such secret intentions of sinners necessarily imply, that they really think that they can serve the Lord, and that there is no insurmountable difficulty in the way. They imagine that they can lay aside their present aversion to religion, as easily as their aversion to many things, which they have laid aside. They have laid aside the follies and vanities of youth, for more manly and important pursuits. They have grown wiser, and mean to grow better, and finally devote themselves to the service of God. These secret intentions flow from a belief, that they can, whenever they shall set about it in earnest, perform every religious duty which God has enjoined. They live upon their good intentions, and self-sufficiency, which afford them much

peace, and hope, and confidence, while they are looking forward to long life and prosperity.

2. Sinners not only secretly intend, but secretly attempt to serve the Lord. Some attempt this in childhood; some attempt it in youth; some attempt it, while in the midst of their days, and engaged in the busy scenes of life; some attempt it, when they are sick, or exposed to danger; and some when they are awakened from their stupidity by the word or providence of God. But very few sinners, who enjoy the common means of grace, entirely neglect religious duties, in some stages and circumstances of their lives. Children and youth often read and pray in secret, as well as attend public worship. Many of riper years, who are ashamed to regard God or religion in public, do secretly call upon God, read his word, and strive to serve the Lord, and secure his favor. But no person, whether young or old, would ever attempt to serve God in secret, if he did not hope and expect to succeed. All sinners, who secretly attempt to serve God, manifest by their practice, that they think they can serve the Lord. Whenever sinners begin to perform religious duties, in any stage of life, they begin with self-confidence, that they are able, as well as desirous to serve God. How many sinners have lived from day to day, and from year to year, in the constant practice of seeking and striving to serve God in secret, with entire dependence upon their own strength, to do the whole of their duty? Though after they have once begun to seek God in secret, they often neglect seeking; yet they do not neglect, because they feel unable to serve God, but because they feel an aversion to spiritual and divine objects. For after they have neglected time after time, they will begin again, and strive with renewed and increased exertions. This plainly proves, that they think they can serve the Lord, notwithstanding any depravity or corruption of heart. They imagine, that nothing is wanting to conquer their depravity, but more arduous, vigorous, and persevering exertions; and these they think they can increase, until they have gained the victory, and obtained the favor of God, which is all they desire.

3. Sinners not only secretly intend, and attempt to serve God, but they often publicly declare, that they will serve him. This a multitude of sinners publicly declared to Joshua. They said, "Therefore will we also serve the Lord, for he is our God." The same said those at mount Sinai, who afterward fell and perished in the wilderness. In both these instances, there is reason to believe, that sinners were sincere in making their declarations. They undoubtedly meant to do what they said they would do.

They said they would serve the Lord; and they intended to do what God had required, and be obedient. But if this was true, they certainly thought they could obey and serve the Lord. Thousands and thousands of other sinners since have felt just as those Israelites did, and have made the same declarations, with the same kind and degree of sincerity. It is extremely natural for men in a state of nature, to think that they can serve God, whenever they shall think that their temporal or eternal good requires them to serve him. When sinners, at a solemn time, and under solemn circumstances, publicly declare that they will serve the Lord, we must believe, that they really think they are able to serve him. And this they have done in innumerable instances; which is a clear evidence that all secure sinners really think they can serve God. But we have still higher evidence of this. For,

4. Sinners have not only secretly intended to serve God, and secretly attempted to serve God, and publicly declared that they would serve God, but they have actually thought they did serve him. The scribes and pharisees in Christ's day, really thought they did serve God in sincerity and truth. They punctually observed all the divine commands, whether ceremonial or moral. Our Saviour, who knew their thoughts, reproved them by a parable, because "they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous." The pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, thanked God that he had served him perfectly. The amiable young man declared, that he had kept all the divine commands from his youth. And Paul said, that, while he was a sinner, he had thought himself, in respect to the law, blameless. It was the general opinion of sinners in Christ's day, that they did sincerely and perfectly serve God. Many sinners have ever since entertained the same high opinion of themselves. Thousands have thought, that they have sincerely obeyed the divine commands, while they were under the entire dominion of sin, and totally destitute of every gracious exercise. But it is impossible for sinners to think, that they really serve God, without thinking that they are able to serve him. Though sinners often complain of their inability to serve God, and say that they cannot serve him; yet their intentions, their exertions, their declarations, and their opinions of themselves, unite to demonstrate, that they do inwardly think they can serve God. They think just as sinners thought in the days of Moses, of Joshua, and of Christ. They really believe that they can, and often believe that they do serve God sincerely and acceptably. I now proceed to inquire,

II. Why sinners imagine they can serve the Lord. This

must be owing to some misapprehension of themselves, or ignorance of their own hearts. Though they believe they are sinful creatures, and naturally inclined to forget and forsake God, and disobey his holy commands; yet they do not believe they are altogether sinful, and wholly destitute of all good desires and intentions. Though they know that their hearts are deceitful; yet they do not know that they are desperately wicked, and absolutely unconquerable by their own exertions. They suppose that their desires to serve God are really good, though not so good as they ought to be, because they are too low and languid. This deficiency they often hope and expect that they shall some time or other make up, by more strong and vigorous desires and exertions. Accordingly, when they seriously set about seeking salvation, they become more and more ardent in their seekings and strivings for divine mercy. They do not know that the plague of their own hearts lies in their total selfishness, and entire regard to their own personal safety and happiness. And consequently they do not know, that the higher their desires, hopes, and fears rise, the more they become displeasing in the sight of God, who looks entirely on the heart, and abhors all selfish feelings. If they only knew the nature of their desires, intentions, resolutions, and exertions, they would no longer think that they could yield God a sincere and acceptable service. They would despair of conquering their depravity, by continually increasing it. But all secure and merely awakened sinners, are really ignorant of the nature of their moral depravity, and while they are ignorant of this, they verily think that they can and do serve God in some measure. They consider their good desires and actual attempts to serve God as acceptable in his sight. Thus the Israelites in Joshua's day, verily thought that they had served God, and would continue to serve him as long as they lived. And sinners at the present day, who are ignorant of their own hearts, entertain the same opinion of themselves. Like Paul in his state of ignorance and moral blindness, they flatter themselves, that it is an easy thing to serve God, while their hearts are far from him, and full of perfect selfishness. It now remains to show,

III. Why sinners cannot serve God. Joshua assigned the true reason to the Israelites. "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God." Holiness is the essence of God's moral character. He is pure and perfect love, which is pure and perfect holiness. All his moral perfections are comprised in love. He loves himself and all created beings according to their real worth and importance.

He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. He is the righteous Lord, who loves righteousness, and hates all unrighteousness in his unholy and sinful creatures. He is of purer eyes than to behold sin or iniquity in any form whatever. And for this reason he requires all men to be like himself, in all their views and feelings. He said to his people of old, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." And this precept the apostle tells us, is still binding upon all mankind. So that without holiness none can see, nor serve, nor enjoy God. This leads me to observe,

1. That sinners cannot serve God, because they cannot love him. God is perfectly holy, but they are perfectly unholy. God is perfectly benevolent, but they are perfectly sinful. God seeks the highest good of the universe supremely, but they seek their own good supremely. Their hearts are diametrically opposite to his heart, their desires to his desires, and their exertions to his exertions. And so long as this contrariety in their hearts exists, it is utterly impossible that they should love God for what he is in himself. They may love him for his favors, but this is only loving themselves. God's first and great command to every sinner is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." While sinners are destitute of love to God, it is impossible that they should perform any acceptable service to him. Their carnal minds are enmity against God, and more opposed to him, than to any other being or object in the universe. So far as they discern, they perfectly hate his holiness. And he knows it. Therefore he abhors and condemns all their external services. The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination in his sight, and he expressly forbids them to bring any more such vain oblations. Though sinners often imagine that they mean to serve God, and not themselves, yet God who knows their hearts perfectly, knows that they really seek their own good, and not his glory, and that they never can serve him, so long as their hearts are in perfect contrariety to his.

2. Sinners cannot serve God, because his laws are perfectly holy, like himself. The apostle says, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." God gave his commands from a holy motive, and he requires nothing but holiness in them. They are in all respects holy. And for this reason, unholy creatures cannot obey them. The apostle declares, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." No external obedience of totally depraved creatures, to a holy law, can be pleasing in his

sight. Hence says Solomon, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." It is morally impossible, that sinners should obey the divine laws, which they perfectly hate, both in their precepts and penalties. Christ obeyed his Father's commands out of love to them. He said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." And Paul said, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." So long as sinners do not love God, nor his laws, they cannot serve him. Besides,

3. Sinners cannot serve God, because they do not love his service. There is no part of his service that they love. They do not love to labor for him, nor to pray to him, nor to promote his interest. They love to labor for themselves, and to promote their own interests. They have a different object from that which God has, and which he requires them to have, in all they do. And whatever attempt they make to serve God, their ultimate design in it all, is, not to serve God, but to serve themselves. It is impossible, therefore, while they feel thus, that they should serve God, or do anything but what he abhors.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If sinners think that they can serve the Lord, then it is easy to see why so many live so easy and secure while they neglect to serve him Mankind commonly neglect to pursue what they suppose they can obtain just when they please. It is wholly owing to their confidence in their own power to serve God whenever they think it is necessary, that they neglect it, and live so easy in their neglect. For whenever they imagine that they shall want time, or opportunity, or disposition, to serve God, they are in distress. No one can look upon himself as in immediate danger of perdition, without being affected by it. Hence sickness often throws sinners into distress, and they cry out in great agony of mind, lest they should now die in their sins and lose their souls. Hence conviction of the plague of their own hearts fills them with distress, and they tremble with fearful apprehensions of the wrath of God. They do not find it so easy to serve the Lord as they expected; and they fear that the time of their serving him will soon be past, and they shall be his enemies, and have him for their enemy forever.

2. If sinners are mistaken in thinking that they can serve God, then it is very important that their mistake should be removed, and that they should be made to see and feel that they

cannot serve God, and to know that the reason is because he is a holy God, to whom their whole hearts are opposed. If sinners think they can serve God, because they are ignorant of their own hearts, then it is of great importance that the *nature* of their total depravity should be clearly and fully laid open before them, though they are ever so averse to seeing it. Sinners can struggle a great while with a sense of their sinfulness and exposedness to divine wrath, if they be not thoroughly convinced of their total moral impotency to break the cords of their iniquity, and flee from the wrath to come. It is one of the last things of which sinners are convinced, that all the struggles and strivings of the carnal mind are utterly in vain, and that while they are in the flesh, they cannot please God, and appease his wrath. But of this the Spirit of God convinces sinners before he changes their hearts.

3. If the inability of sinners to serve God arises from the contrariety of their hearts to the heart of God, then it is altogether sinful and inexcusable. They ought to love God and serve him, because he is holy and worthy to be loved and served. But this is the reason why they cannot, and the only reason. Their inability therefore is their sin; and the more unable they are to love God for his holiness, the more inexcusable and sinful they are; because all their inability arises from the utter aversion of their hearts to that which is good.

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death. Most of the Deists in Europe, if not in America, are what are called *mortal* Deists, and maintain that the soul dies with the body. But as men, they have no ground for this opinion. Their noble, moral, intellectual powers, which constitute them moral agents and accountable beings, afford them a strong presumption, that they shall continue to exist after death, and be rewarded, or punished for their deeds done in the body. It is true, indeed, this evidence of the immortality of their souls does not amount to strict demonstration, but it does amount to the highest probability, and lays them under obligation to believe their accountability and future existence, and to prepare for it. It is absurd and criminal for men to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," and cease to exist. Reason and conscience give all men a presentiment that they shall exist in a happy or miserable state after death. It becomes them as men, who possess noble intellectual powers and faculties, to show themselves men, and duly prepare for all that awaits them in every future stage of their existence. And it must be extremely dangerous and criminal, to employ all their abilities to convince themselves and others, that they may safely live and die, like the brutes that perish. Hence,

8. This subject teaches the vast importance of self-knowledge. A pagan could say, the precept "Know thyself," came from heaven. The apostle puts the solemn question to Christians, "Know ye not your own selves?" All men are capable of knowing their own selves, and it must be folly and absurdity in the extreme for any men, and especially for Christians, and even for heathen to be ignorant of themselves. But no knowledge has been so much neglected, by the learned and unlearned, the wise and unwise, the great, the rich, and the prosperous, as self-knowledge. Men have been inquisitive in all ages, and spent much time, and thought, and expense, to acquire a large stock of every species of knowledge respecting the improvements which mankind have made in arts, sciences, and literature. But while they have gained the knowledge of these things, they have been grossly ignorant of themselves. Every man carries a little world within himself, by knowing which he might know all the rest of mankind, and form a just estimate of the whole world and of all who live in it. For "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." By knowing his own intellectual powers, a man may know the intellectual powers of all men. They all have the same mental powers, though not in the same vigor and activity. They all have the same native corruption of heart, which leads them to forget and forsake God, to pursue lying vanities, and to neglect

their own eternal good and the eternal good of others. When any man becomes acquainted with his own heart, and is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, he knows more about God, about himself, about his fellow-men, about the world in which they live, the objects which they pursue, and the effects and consequences of their living here and hereafter, than he could learn by merely searching the history of the whole world. If men would only seek after self-knowledge, which is so easy to attain, it would fill their hearts with gratitude to God for making them wiser than the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven; for giving them such a noble, rational, and immortal existence; for sending his Son to save them from their guilty and lost condition; for doing them so much good, while they are evil, and abusing his favors; and for preparing them to know, love, serve, and enjoy him forever. At the same time, it would fill them with humiliation and self-abasement for all the injuries they have done to God, to Christ, to the holy Spirit, to saints, to sinners, and to themselves. Since you are men, why will you not seek to know and show yourselves men!

9. Since all men have rational powers and faculties, it is easy for God to give sinners a true knowledge of themselves, and humble them in the dust for living and acting as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. It is only for God to open the eyes of their mind and turn their attention to their own powers and faculties, and their abuse of them, and it will make them appear more vile than the brutes that perish. Such a view of themselves has led many to wish that God had not made them men. And it would be infinitely better for sinners, who employ all their rational powers in contending with their Maker, and opposing his interests and their own forever, if they were not men. Be entreated then to awake from your stupidity and show yourselves men. But if you despise this admonition, God has told you, that you alone must bear the tremendous consequences.

Whether sinners will hear, or forbear to hear, the text, we are to remember, is addressed to saints, and forbids them to be as the horse and mule, which have no understanding. If you will awake out of stupidity, God promises to guide you by his eye, and lead you to employ all your powers and faculties, gifts, and graces, in promoting his glory, the good of your fellow-creatures, and your own future and eternal felicity.

SERMON XXIV.

MORAL INABILITY OF SINNERS.

"And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God."—Joshua, xxiv. 19.

Immediately after the death of Moses, Joshua took the charge of the children of Israel, and conducted them, through hosts of enemies whom he subdued, to the land of promise. And though he was then eighty-five years old, yet he continued to govern the nation for twenty-five years longer. During this period, he divided the land among the twelve tribes, and directed all their civil and religious concerns with great wisdom and integrity. But in the course of nearly thirty years, many of the people died, and others lost the serious impressions which the dangers and trials of the wilderness had made upon their minds, while a younger generation rose up, who had seen less, and known less of the God of their fathers. These causes Joshua foresaw would naturally bring on a religious declension, which he greatly deprecated. Deeply impressed with their danger and his own speedy departure, he called all the people together, and rehearsed their history from the beginning. And in the review of the divine goodness towards them, he exhorted them to fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth; but as for himself and his household, they would serve the Lord. To this the people replied, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for the Lord our God, he it is that brought us up, and our fathers, out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed.—Therefore will we also serve the Lord; for he is our God. And Joshua said unto the people, ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God." These words plainly teach us,

That though sinners think they can, yet they cannot serve the Lord. I shall show,

I. That sinners generally think they can serve the Lord.

II. Why they think they can serve the Lord. And

III. Why they cannot serve him.

I. I am to show, that sinners generally think that they can serve the Lord. I say they generally think so, because they may think otherwise, and do sometimes, under certain circumstances, really think otherwise. But so long as God suffers them to walk in their own way, and pursue the objects which are the most agreeable to their natural hearts, they universally think that they can serve the Lord, whenever they find it convenient or important to serve him. Though they feel a present reluctance to every religious duty, yet they have no apprehension that this reluctance will ever arise so high, as to become unconquerable. They are very confident they can perform that service, which God requires them to perform, in order to obtain his pardoning mercy. This will appear from various considerations.

1. They sometimes secretly intend to serve the Lord. There are many, who have been religiously educated, who early think seriously about their spiritual concerns, and really intend to secure the salvation of their souls before they die. But they find so much reluctance to religious duties, and religious objects, that they totally neglect the service of God. They do not, however, renounce their good intentions in childhood, nor in youth, nor in riper years, but endeavor in some measure to cherish their serious purposes, especially when they hear serious things, or are placed in serious circumstances. And though some may grow very stupid, and grossly disobedient, yet even these have their serious intervals, when their serious intentions recur, and constrain them to re-resolve that they will carry their intention into effect, and sincerely serve the Lord. Now all such secret intentions of sinners necessarily imply, that they really think that they can serve the Lord, and that there is no insurmountable difficulty in the way. They imagine that they can lay aside their present aversion to religion, as easily as their aversion to many things, which they have laid aside. They have laid aside the follies and vanities of youth, for more manly and important pursuits. They have grown wiser, and mean to grow better, and finally devote themselves to the service of God. These secret intentions flow from a belief, that they can, whenever they shall set about it in earnest, perform every religious duty which God has enjoined. They live upon their good intentions, and self-sufficiency, which afford them much

peace, and hope, and confidence, while they are looking forward to long life and prosperity.

2. Sinners not only secretly intend, but secretly attempt to serve the Lord. Some attempt this in childhood; some attempt it in youth; some attempt it, while in the midst of their days, and engaged in the busy scenes of life; some attempt it, when they are sick, or exposed to danger; and some when they are awakened from their stupidity by the word or providence of God. But very few sinners, who enjoy the common means of grace, entirely neglect religious duties, in some stages and circumstances of their lives. Children and youth often read and pray in secret, as well as attend public worship. Many of riper years, who are ashamed to regard God or religion in public, do secretly call upon God, read his word, and strive to serve the Lord, and secure his favor. But no person, whether young or old, would ever attempt to serve God in secret, if he did not hope and expect to succeed. All sinners, who secretly attempt to serve God, manifest by their practice, that they think they can serve the Lord. Whenever sinners begin to perform religious duties, in any stage of life, they begin with self-confidence, that they are able, as well as desirous to serve God. How many sinners have lived from day to day, and from year to year, in the constant practice of seeking and striving to serve God in secret, with entire dependence upon their own strength, to do the whole of their duty? Though after they have once begun to seek God in secret, they often neglect seeking; yet they do not neglect, because they feel unable to serve God, but because they feel an aversion to spiritual and divine objects. For after they have neglected time after time, they will begin again, and strive with renewed and increased exertions. This plainly proves, that they think they can serve the Lord, notwithstanding any depravity or corruption of heart. They imagine, that nothing is wanting to conquer their depravity, but more arduous, vigorous, and persevering exertions; and these they think they can increase, until they have gained the victory, and obtained the favor of God, which is all they desire.

3. Sinners not only secretly intend, and attempt to serve God, but they often publicly declare, that they will serve him. This a multitude of sinners publicly declared to Joshua. They said, "Therefore will we also serve the Lord, for he is our God." The same said those at mount Sinai, who afterward fell and perished in the wilderness. In both these instances, there is reason to believe, that sinners were sincere in making their declarations. They undoubtedly meant to do what they said they would do.

They said they would serve the Lord; and they intended to do what God had required, and be obedient. But if this was true, they certainly thought they could obey and serve the Lord. Thousands and thousands of other sinners since have felt just as those Israelites did, and have made the same declarations, with the same kind and degree of sincerity. It is extremely natural for men in a state of nature, to think that they can serve God, whenever they shall think that their temporal or eternal good requires them to serve him. When sinners, at a solemn time, and under solemn circumstances, publicly declare that they will serve the Lord, we must believe, that they really think they are able to serve him. And this they have done in innumerable instances; which is a clear evidence that all secure sinners really think they can serve God. But we have still higher evidence of this. For,

4. Sinners have not only secretly intended to serve God, and secretly attempted to serve God, and publicly declared that they would serve God, but they have actually thought they did serve him. The scribes and pharisees in Christ's day, really thought they did serve God in sincerity and truth. They punctually observed all the divine commands, whether ceremonial or moral. Our Saviour, who knew their thoughts, reproved them by a parable, because "they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous." The pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, thanked God that he had served him perfectly. The amiable young man declared, that he had kept all the divine commands from his youth. And Paul said, that, while he was a sinner, he had thought himself, in respect to the law, blameless. It was the general opinion of sinners in Christ's day, that they did sincerely and perfectly serve God. Many sinners have ever since entertained the same high opinion of themselves. Thousands have thought, that they have sincerely obeyed the divine commands, while they were under the entire dominion of sin, and totally destitute of every gracious exercise. But it is impossible for sinners to think, that they really serve God, without thinking that they are able to serve him. Though sinners often complain of their inability to serve God, and say that they cannot serve him; yet their intentions, their exertions, their declarations, and their opinions of themselves, unite to demonstrate, that they do inwardly think they can serve God. They think just as sinners thought in the days of Moses, of Joshua, and of Christ. They really believe that they can, and often believe that they do serve God sincerely and acceptably. I now proceed to inquire,

II. Why sinners imagine they can serve the Lord. This

must be owing to some misapprehension of themselves, or ignorance of their own hearts. Though they believe they are sinful creatures, and naturally inclined to forget and forsake God, and disobey his holy commands; yet they do not believe they are altogether sinful, and wholly destitute of all good desires and intentions. Though they know that their hearts are deceitful; yet they do not know that they are desperately wicked, and absolutely unconquerable by their own exertions. They suppose that their desires to serve God are really good, though not so good as they ought to be, because they are too low and languid. This deficiency they often hope and expect that they shall some time or other make up, by more strong and vigorous desires and exertions. Accordingly, when they seriously set about seeking salvation, they become more and more ardent in their seekings and strivings for divine mercy. They do not know that the plague of their own hearts lies in their total selfishness, and entire regard to their own personal safety and happiness. And consequently they do not know, that the higher their desires, hopes, and fears rise, the more they become displeasing in the sight of God, who looks entirely on the heart, and abhors all selfish feelings. If they only knew the nature of their desires, intentions, resolutions, and exertions, they would no longer think that they could yield God a sincere and acceptable service. They would despair of conquering their depravity, by continually increasing it. But all secure and merely awakened sinners, are really ignorant of the nature of their moral depravity, and while they are ignorant of this, they verily think that they can and do serve God in some measure. They consider their good desires and actual attempts to serve God as acceptable in his sight. Thus the Israelites in Joshua's day, verily thought that they had served God, and would continue to serve him as long as they lived. And sinners at the present day, who are ignorant of their own hearts, entertain the same opinion of themselves. Like Paul in his state of ignorance and moral blindness, they flatter themselves, that it is an easy thing to serve God, while their hearts are far from him, and full of perfect selfishness. It now remains to show,

III. Why sinners cannot serve God. Joshua assigned the true reason to the Israelites. "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God." Holiness is the essence of God's moral character. He is pure and perfect love, which is pure and perfect holiness. All his moral perfections are comprised in love. He loves himself and all created beings according to their real worth and importance.

He is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. He is the righteous Lord, who loves righteousness, and hates all unrighteousness in his unholy and sinful creatures. He is of purer eyes than to behold sin or iniquity in any form whatever. And for this reason he requires all men to be like himself, in all their views and feelings. He said to his people of old, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." And this precept the apostle tells us, is still binding upon all mankind. So that without holiness none can see, nor serve, nor enjoy God. This leads me to observe,

1. That sinners cannot serve God, because they cannot love him. God is perfectly holy, but they are perfectly unholy. God is perfectly benevolent, but they are perfectly sinful. God seeks the highest good of the universe supremely, but they seek their own good supremely. Their hearts are diametrically opposite to his heart, their desires to his desires, and their exertions to his exertions. And so long as this contrariety in their hearts exists, it is utterly impossible that they should love God for what he is in himself. They may love him for his favors, but this is only loving themselves. God's first and great command to every sinner is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." While sinners are destitute of love to God, it is impossible that they should perform any acceptable service to him. Their carnal minds are enmity against God, and more opposed to him, than to any other being or object in the universe. So far as they discern, they perfectly hate his holiness. And he knows it. Therefore he abhors and condemns all their external services. The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination in his sight, and he expressly forbids them to bring any more such vain oblations. Though sinners often imagine that they mean to serve God, and not themselves, yet God who knows their hearts perfectly, knows that they really seek their own good, and not his glory, and that they never can serve him, so long as their hearts are in perfect contrariety to his.

2. Sinners cannot serve God, because his laws are perfectly holy, like himself. The apostle says, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." God gave his commands from a holy motive, and he requires nothing but holiness in them. They are in all respects holy. And for this reason, unholy creatures cannot obey them. The apostle declares, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." No external obedience of totally depraved creatures, to a holy law, can be pleasing in his

SERMON XXV.

HOLINESS, INTRINSICALLY AND SUPREMELY EXCELLENT AND VALUABLE.

"For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it."—Prov. viii. 11.

Every one who has read the book of Proverbs with any attention, must have observed, that Solomon means by wisdom holiness, and by folly sin; by a wise man a saint, and by a fool a sinner. This may be sufficiently illustrated by two or three instances. In the last verse of the third chapter, he says, "The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools." Who can doubt, whether by the wise he means saints, or by fools sinners? In the ninth chapter, and tenth verse, he says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" by which he means to assert, that true wisdom is true piety, or real holiness. He says again, (Prov. xxvi. 11,) "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." By the folly of a fool, he here means the sin of a sinner. If we may understand Solomon according to his peculiar and uniform phraseology, we may safely conclude that by wisdom in the text, he means moral goodness, or true holiness. This gives us a right to drop the metaphor, and read the text in this form, Holiness is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. It is hard to conceive how the intrinsic worth and excellence of holiness could be painted in brighter colors than by comparing it to rubies, the richest and most beautiful objects in nature. Solomon knew the essential difference between natural and moral excellence, and therefore meant to represent holiness, which is, in its own nature, morally excellent, as far superior to rubies, or any natural object, which has no moral quality or intrinsic value. He evidently intended to express in the strongest terms this important truth,

That holiness is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. I shall endeavor,

I. To explain this general observation. And

II. To support it.

In the first place, it seems necessary to explain what is to be understood by holiness being, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. Holiness is distinct from knowledge, for they often exist separately. It is equally evident that holiness is distinct from happiness, for these are not always united. Holiness is much more rare in this world, than knowledge and happiness. These, to a considerable degree, are very common among mankind. Men may arrive at great eminence in knowledge, while totally destitute of holiness. This belongs to the heart, and not to the understanding. It may be termed goodness, rather than greatness. "God is love:" and pure, disinterested love is the sum and comprehension of all holiness in every morally virtuous being. This holy love is, in its own nature, truly valuable and excellent, by which is meant, that it is, in itself considered, and separate from all its fruits and effects, really virtuous and valuable. Some things are valuable only as means, and not as ends; but others are valuable as ends, and not as means. Bread and other kinds of food are valuable as means to preserve life; and good books are valuable as means to promote knowledge. But neither bread nor books would have any value, if the one did not feed the body, and the other feed the mind. They are not, therefore, valuable in their own nature. But holiness is morally excellent in its own nature, aside from all its happy effects and consequences. And as it is intrinsically excellent, so it is supremely valuable. There is nothing in the universe equal to it in worth and importance. It is more precious than rubies; "and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." It is the one thing needful. But as this is a subject of great importance, and one upon which there is a diversity of opinions, I shall endeavor to make it appear, as proposed,

II. That holiness is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. It may be observed,

1. That holiness is the supreme excellence of the most excellent beings. God is possessed of the highest natural perfections and excellencies. His existence is independent, and his power, knowledge, and wisdom are unlimited. These constitute his superlative greatness. But his holiness surpasses his greatness, and spreads a superior excellence and glory over all his other attributes. There is infinitely more worth and excellence in his holiness, than in all his natural perfections united.

This is not only the dictate of reason, but the representation of scripture. God is more celebrated for his holiness, than for any other perfections of his nature. In celebrating his praise at the side of the Red Sea, the Israelites sang, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness?" And the heavenly hosts cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." God himself views his holiness as his supreme excellence. When Moses besought him to show him his glory, he answered, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee." Holiness is unquestionably the supreme excellence of the Supreme Being.

The angels of heaven stand next to the Deity in respect to their mental powers. But their perfect holiness is their supreme excellence, and gives them a beauty and worth superior to any unholy creatures. The beauties of holiness give Gabriel all his superiority to Lucifer the son of the morning. And it is equally true, that holiness is the supreme excellence of man. Though he was created but a little lower than the angels, and still possesses intellectual faculties superior to any created natures on earth, yet he never reaches his highest excellence, until he bears that moral image of God, which consists in righteousness and true holiness. Accordingly Solomon said, "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor;" and David pronounced the saints that are in the earth to be "the excellent, in whom was all his delight." Now where shall we look for the highest excellence, but among the highest and most excellent of beings? And if we can find nothing among them so excellent as holiness, then holiness is the most excellent thing to be found in the universe. If there be nothing in God, in angels, in men, in heaven, and in earth, so valuable and excellent as holiness, we must necessarily conclude, that it is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. This will further appear,

2. If we consider that holiness is that which God supremely requires in all his commands. When a certain man said to Christ, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The apostle also gives the same exposition of the divine commands, when he declares, that "love is the fulfilling of the law. All that the divine law requires is comprised in holy love. Holiness, therefore, is the whole duty and highest excellence of

man. If there were anything more noble, or morally excellent than holiness, we might have expected, that God would have required us to pursue that supremely, and holiness subordinately. But he has expressly commanded us to pursue holiness supremely, and everything else in subordination to it. The apostolic exhortation runs in this form: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." This divine injunction plainly implies, that everything, which is virtuous and praiseworthy, and which God requires, is a branch of true holiness, which is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable.

3. The intrinsic and supreme excellence of holiness appears from the ultimate end of Christ in dying for the salvation of the elect. The apostle tells us that "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." Hence the elect are said to be "chosen in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Accordingly, when Christ ascended on high after his resurrection, "he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The ultimate design of Christ in all he did and suffered for the church, was to raise it to a state of holiness. But would he have done and suffered so much for this end, if he had not viewed holiness as intrinsically excellent? His ultimate purpose in dying for his people was, to save them from their sins and adorn them with the white robes of holiness. This will give them a crown of glory, which will never fade, and raise them to the highest perfection to which they can be raised. The whole of Christ's mediatorial conduct speaks louder than words, and proclaims holiness to be the supreme glory and perfection of all created and uncreated beings.

4. The final inheritance of the righteous will consist primarily in holiness, which is another proof, that holiness is supremely excellent and valuable. Holiness is repeatedly prom-

ised to saints as their final portion or inheritance in heaven. This is intimated in 2 Cor. i. 21. "Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Again in the fifth chapter he says, "Now, he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." The "earnest" is that which one person gives another, as a pledge of giving the whole of what he has promised to give. It is often a part of the whole, as well as a pledge of it. God has promised to give saints an inheritance in heaven, and he gives them an earnest of this beforehand, and the earnest consists in holiness, which is a plain intimation that the full inheritance will be of the same nature. So the apostle explains the matter, Eph. i. 11. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Agreeably to this, the inheritance is called "incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away;" and believers are said to "have an inheritance among them that are sanctified." The apostle John represents the church as being put in possession of this holy inheritance, at the time of their arriving in heaven. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." This is agreeable to what our Saviour said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." And again, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." If to shine forever in the beauties of holiness, will be the final inheritance of the righteous, then we must suppose, that holiness is the richest and most valuable thing which God has to bestow upon the objects of his love. Furthermore,

5. It can never be right to sacrifice holiness, for the sake of obtaining any other object in the universe. This is conclusive evidence that holiness is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable. A less natural good may be given up for the sake of gaining a greater natural good. A man may sac-

rifice his property to regain his health or to preserve his life. Or those who possess silver, and gold, and rubies, may sacrifice these valuable things to promote the safety of their country, or the salvation of such as are perishing for the lack of gospel light. But no man may sacrifice his holiness, or do evil that good may come. Though a man may sacrifice all his temporal interest to promote a greater public interest; yet he may not sacrifice his veracity, or tell an intentional lie, to save a nation from temporal ruin. It was right for Christ to obscure his glory by a veil of humanity, and to suffer and die on the cross, to save his people from their sins and from the wrath to come; but it would not have been right for him to have sacrificed his holiness, and spoken blasphemy, to save both men and devils from endless destruction. "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering;" but it would not have become him to falsify his word, or break his promise to his Son, and refuse to raise him from the dead. Now, it is only because holiness is, in its own nature, supremely valuable and excellent, that it may never be sacrificed, on any occasion or consideration whatever. If it had been right for Christians to sacrifice their holiness, thousands and thousands of martyrs might have saved their lives by only disavowing the truth, or denying the faith. But they wisely chose to sacrifice their lives, rather than their holiness. It can never be right for any moral agent to sacrifice his holiness, to promote any design, to obtain any good, or to avoid any evil. But this is true, only on the supposition that holiness is intrinsically and supremely excellent.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Is holiness, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable? Then God is infinitely more excellent and glorious than any created beings in the universe. His holiness, like the holiness of saints and angels, consists in true benevolence. God is love, and his love is pure, disinterested benevolence; which, in respect to magnitude and worth, bears an exact proportion to his knowledge. His knowledge is intuitive, constant, and unlimited. He looks through the whole universe, every moment, and sees it in all its parts, relations, connections and consequences. Or he constantly knows all things past, present, and to come. And when he moves any single wheel in providence, he has respect to the good of the whole universe collect-

ively considered. Of consequence, every exercise of his benevolence terminates upon the good of the whole universe to all eternity. There is, therefore, more holiness, moral excellence, and worth in one exercise of his benevolence, than in all the benevolent exercises of holy creatures through eternal ages. For the united knowledge of all holy creatures is unspeakably less, than the knowledge of God. They never will arrive at such a comprehensive knowledge of the universe, as God always has had, and always will have. Neither saints nor angels ever have had, or ever will have a perfect knowledge of God, and of all his creatures; and therefore they never have exercised, and never will exercise so much benevolence, as God exercises every moment, towards angels and men, and every percipient creature on earth. There is none good but one. There is none holy as the Lord. There is none among the sons of the mighty that can be compared to the Deity, in point of holiness, benevolence, moral worth, and excellence. He is glorious in holiness above the conception of the whole intelligent creation.

2. Is holiness, in its own nature, supremely excellent and valuable? Then those who deny that holiness has any intrinsic excellence, and maintain that it is valuable only as it tends to promote happiness, are extremely erroneous in speculation. Hume, Darwin, and Godwin among the infidels, and Law, Brown, and Paley among the divines, in England, have imbibed and propagated this egregious error. The philosophers in France, and Germany, and many ingenious and learned men in America, professedly maintain, that holiness is not, in its own nature, morally and supremely excellent; but is valuable only as it tends to promote happiness. This is an error of the first magnitude. It robs God, angels, and saints of all their moral beauty, excellence, and glory. For if happiness be more excellent and valuable than holiness; then the happiest, and not the holiest beings are the most excellent. But who can suppose that the rich man was more excellent than Lazarus, merely because he was more happy? Or who can suppose, that the spirits of just men made perfect are more excellent than the spirits in prison, merely because they are more happy? Or who can suppose that God is infinitely more excellent than any of his creatures, merely because he is infinitely more happy? There is no moral beauty or excellence in mere happiness, and therefore the holiest, and not the happiest beings must necessarily be the most excellent. To deny that holiness has any intrinsic moral excellence, is to deny that there is any such thing as moral virtue or holiness in the universe.

For if there be any such thing as holiness or virtue, it must consist in benevolence, or selfishness, or happiness. But we intuitively know that there is no virtue or moral excellence in selfishness, which is the root and source of all natural and moral evil. And we as intuitively know, that there is no virtue or moral excellence in happiness, which is common to all irrational, as well as rational creatures. The ox as well as his owner, is capable of happiness. If then there is, or can be, any such thing as holiness, virtue, or moral excellence, it must consist in benevolence, or pure, disinterested love. What can be more false, more absurd, and more destructive in its nature or tendency, than to deny that holiness has any intrinsic excellence, and to maintain that happiness is the only thing in the universe which is to be supremely desired and sought.

3. Is holiness, in its own nature, morally and supremely excellent? Then it is never right to do anything contrary to holiness, in order to promote either private or public good. Mankind have racked their inventions to find out reasons or excuses to justify themselves in pursuing private and public happiness, at the expense of holiness. It is an established maxim with the Papists, that they are not bound to keep faith with Protestants, if it be for their benefit to violate it. It is a maxim with politicians, that "the safety of the nation is the supreme law;" so that they may exercise injustice, tyranny, and oppression towards their subjects, or other nations, to preserve their own. It is a maxim with many moral philosophers, that extorted promises are not binding, and that men may lie to save their property or their lives from the violence of robbers. It is a maxim with some celebrated ethical writers, that no public or private oaths and contracts are binding, when the general good does not require their fulfilment. It is a general opinion that it is right to tempt God, by making lotteries to build churches, colleges, hospitals, and other public works of general utility. But if holiness be, in its own nature, morally and supremely excellent and valuable, then it can never be right to do any of these things for the sake of private or public good. Holiness is too excellent and valuable, ever to be sacrificed to promote happiness. If it be right to make lotteries to build churches and colleges, why is it not equally right to make lotteries in favor of Bible and Missionary societies? If it be right to break extorted promises, why is it not equally right to break unwise and unprofitable ones? If it be right for one nation to break their treaties and contracts with another nation, to promote their own national happiness, why is it not equally right for one man to break his contracts with another,

to promote his personal happiness? In short, if it be right to sacrifice holiness to happiness in one case, why is it not equally right to sacrifice holiness to happiness in all cases? Whatever plausible reasons or excuses men may devise to justify themselves in acting contrary to truth, justice, and benevolence, they will sooner or later be convinced, that it is infinitely wrong to do evil, that good may come.

4. If holiness be, in its own nature, morally good; then sin is, in its own nature, morally evil. The nature of sin is diametrically opposite to the nature of holiness. The nature of holiness is benevolence, and the nature of sin is selfishness. Fire and water are not more contrary to each other, than selfishness and benevolence. As it is the nature and not the tendency of benevolence, which renders it morally good; so it is the nature and not the tendency of selfishness, which renders it morally evil. Benevolence is morally good, aside from its tendency to promote happiness; and selfishness is morally evil, aside from its tendency to promote misery. If this were not true, benevolence would be only a natural good; and selfishness only a natural evil. And upon this supposition, if there could be as much happiness produced by selfishness as by benevolence, it would be as well and as right for God to banish all benevolence from the universe, as to banish all selfishness. But who can conceive that a world of selfish creatures should be as happy as a world of benevolent creatures? And if they were as happy, that they should be as morally excellent and amiable? It is as unquestionably true, that selfishness is, in its own nature, morally evil, as that benevolence is, in its own nature, morally good. And it is upon this principle, that selfishness or sin deserves everlasting punishment. If sin were evil only as it tends to promote misery, then there would be no more evil in it, than there is misery produced by it. There would be no more evil in stealing, for instance, than the injury done to him who lost his property. And there would be no more evil in breaking a promise, than the injury done by the violation of veracity. It is easy to see, on this supposition, that neither the thief nor the liar would deserve everlasting punishment, nor indeed any punishment at all, if they only made good the damages to the persons injured. But if sin is, in its own nature, morally evil, then the least sin deserves eternal punishment, and all the gold of Ophir cannot take away that desert. Upon this ground, God threatens eternal destruction to every one, who in the least degree transgresses his law of love, or acts contrary to true benevolence.

5. If holiness is, in its own nature, supremely excellent and

amiable, then the mutual affections which subsist between perfectly holy beings can never be dissolved. Their union is founded upon moral excellence, which no circumstances can change or destroy. There never can be a reason why they should not love one another for their moral excellence. The mutual affection between David and Jonathan was founded upon moral excellence, and will last forever. The mutual affection between true believers and Christ is founded in moral excellence, and will last forever. The mutual affection between Christ and his Father is founded in moral excellence, and will last forever. And the mutual affection which will eventually subsist between God and all holy beings, will be the source of the purest and highest happiness of heaven forever. To this perfect and perpetually increasing felicity all real Christians are approaching, as they are growing in grace, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. They are mutually praying for this mutual affection; and Christ is also interceding with the Father to make them completely united. "Neither pray I for these alone," (that is, my disciples,) "but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Can there be a brighter prospect than this, exhibited before the minds of all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity?

6. If holiness be, in its own nature, morally good, and sin, in its own nature, morally evil; then all the mutual affections which subsist between unholy and perfectly selfish creatures, will eventually be dissolved, and turn into mutual hatred, enmity, and opposition. The union of holy creatures is founded in the nature of benevolence, and not in mutable circumstances; but the union of unholy creatures is not founded in the nature of selfishness, but is merely accidental and circumstantial. It is the nature of selfishness to disunite; and nothing but circumstances lead sinners to unite in anything. And when circumstances alter, their mutual affection turns into mutual disaffection, enmity, and opposition. Ahithophel was friendly to David until he expected that Solomon would raise him to higher preferment, and then he turned an open enemy to David, and sought to take away his life. All the selfish unions and combinations of sinners in this life, will be dissolved in the next, and become sources of mutual and eternal enmity and opposition. They will mutually discover each other's selfishness, and hate and abhor each other for it. They are extremely unwise, as well as criminal, in uniting their hearts, their interests, their exertions, and influence, in carrying on designs

which are displeasing to God, grievous to his friends, and destructive to themselves. They may know beforehand, that they will sooner or later blame themselves, and hate and despise one another, for their conduct. The sooner, therefore, that their unions and combinations are dissolved, the better for them, and for others.

7. If holiness is, in its own nature, morally and supremely excellent; and sin, in its own nature, morally evil and odious; then we see why God disapproves and condemns the desires and prayers of sinners. They sometimes desire and pray for holiness with great ardor and importunity. But God, who knows their selfish hearts, knows that they do not desire holiness for its own sake, nor hate sin for its own sake. They only desire happiness and hate misery, and pray for holiness merely to escape misery and obtain happiness. This is making happiness the greatest good, and not holiness; and misery the greatest evil, and not sin. Their prayers, therefore, are in direct contradiction to scripture, reason, and conscience, and of course must be odious and abominable in the sight of the righteous Lord, who loves righteousness, holiness, and benevolence, but hates sin, iniquity, and selfishness. And when sinners are under genuine convictions, they have the same view of their prayers.

SERMON XXVI.

LAW OF GOD, THE MEDIUM OF CONVERSION.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul."—Psalm xix. 7.

It is generally believed, that sinners must be converted in order to be saved; but it has long been a serious question whether God employs any, and if any, what means, in producing this essential change. David, in this Psalm, first indirectly tells us what means God does not employ in converting sinners, and then plainly mentions what means he does employ in turning them effectually to himself. Though he allows, that God makes some discovery of his being and perfections by his works of creation and providence; yet he expressly declares, that it is by his word that he produces a saving change in the human heart. Hear his own words upon this subject: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." To this light of nature the Psalmist immediately contrasts the light of divine revelation. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." By the law of the Lord, David sometimes means the whole of that revelation, which God had given to his people at that day; but here he seems to have a more particular reference to the moral law, which is more properly and emphatically called the law of God. And what he says concerning the law seems to apply to the law of love, rather than to divine revelation in general. Of this law it may be truly said, "It is perfect, converting the soul." The text contains two things, which deserve a distinct consideration.

I. That the law of God is perfect; and

II. That it is the medium through which he converts sinners.

The perfection of the divine law is the first thing to be considered.

The law of God consists of two parts, the precept, and the penalty; or that which it requires, and that which it threatens.

We are expressly told what the precept of the law is, by two infallible expositors, Moses and Christ. Moses has explained it in these words: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." When a certain lawyer asked Christ, "Which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The first and great commandment involves the second, and every other commandment. For the law requires nothing but love. And upon this ground, the apostle says, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." But what love does the divine law require? The answer is plain and easy; it is the same kind of love, which forms the moral character and supreme glory of God. "God is love." And his love embraces all percipient beings, whether rational or irrational, whether holy or unholy. He "is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works." His law is a transcript of his own moral character, and requires men to exercise the same pure, holy love, which he exercises. This our Saviour taught in his sermon on the mount. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is now easy to see, that the law of God is absolutely perfect, or perfect in all respects, because it requires that kind of love, in which all

moral perfection consists, and in exact proportion to the powers and faculties of every individual person, who is capable of understanding the law. It requires every one to love God, at all times, with all his, heart, mind, and strength. And this is requiring neither too much nor too little. It is a precept, perfectly adapted to all mankind.

If we now consider the penalty of the divine law, it will appear as perfect as the precept. The penalty of the law is death. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "The wages of sin is death." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This is the curse, which shall be inflicted on all the impenitent at the last day; and therefore signifies nothing less than everlasting punishment. The transgression of a perfectly holy and just law is sin; and every sin deserves punishment; and this desert of punishment can never be taken away. Punishment has no tendency to destroy the desert of punishment; and consequently, if sin deserves any punishment, it deserves that punishment forever. The punishment which the fallen angels have already endured, has not lessened their desert of punishment, and no future punishment can lessen their ill-desert. Consequently they must in strict justice be punished forever. If then it was just for God to threaten any punishment to the transgressors of his holy law, it was just to threaten them with endless punishment. This he has threatened, and this threatening is perfectly just. So the apostle thought, when he saw this threatening pointed against himself. "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Thus the law of God is absolutely perfect, both in its precept and in its penalty. I now proceed,

II. To show, that it is through the medium of this perfect law, that God converts sinners. It is the perfection of the divine law, which gives it all its weight and energy, and makes it a proper instrument of converting the souls of men. Through the medium of his perfect law, which is clothed with his infinite authority, God causes sinners to feel the weight of all his great and glorious perfections, which is sufficient to make the stoutest hearts stoop. This leads me to observe,

1. That it is by means of his perfect law, that he awakens sinners to a realizing sense of their danger. They are naturally stupid, and extremely insensible of their lost and perish-

ing condition, and do all in their power to keep themselves in carnal security. They say unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." They shut their eyes against the light, stop their ears against the truth, and harden their hearts against conviction. They think themselves "rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Such were the views and feelings of Paul, in his natural state. He says, "I was alive without the law once." He had no apprehension of the wrath of God, and of his danger of eternal destruction. But there is a propriety, if not an absolute necessity of awakening sinners to see their dangerous condition, before they are converted. Accordingly God usually gives sinners a clear and affecting view of their dangerous state, before he makes them the subjects of his special grace. This he does by means of his perfect law, which condemns them for the least violation of it, to eternal death. Though Paul was very suddenly converted, he was first awakened by the divine law. The penalty of the law destroyed his carnal peace, and alarmed his fears. Though he was alive without the law; yet when the commandment came, sin revived, and he died. It is in the penalty of his law, that God has expressed his feelings towards sinners, and manifested his vindictive justice, which will burn to the lowest hell. And when he brings the law home to sinners, he makes them feel that they are every moment exposed to endless ruin. It was such a sense of danger that alarmed the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, and constrained them to cry out in the utmost anxiety and distress, "Men and brethren, what shall we do." There is no peace to the wicked, while they realize the wrath of God abiding upon them, and the penalty of his holy law pointed against them. God, indeed, acts as a sovereign in awakening sinners. He awakens some much more than others, and holds them under the terrors of his law much longer, before he delivers them from its condemnation.

2. It is through the medium of his perfect law, that God convinces sinners of their guilt, and just desert of eternal destruction. It is one thing to make them see their danger, and another to make them feel their guilt. It is one thing to awaken their fears, and another to set their sins in order before them, and make them see that they deserve eternal death. God awakens multitudes whom he never convinces nor converts. All the children of Israel were awakened by the divine law at mount Sinai, but they soon lost their fears, and many of them fell and perished in the wilderness. A vast many were

awakened under the preaching of John, and of Christ, who we have reason to think were never convinced, nor converted. While the three thousand were converted on the day of Pentecost, fear fell upon every soul of the spectators of that solemn scene. Sinners may have a distressing sense of their danger, while they are insensible that they are under the reigning power of sin. This makes them complain of God as a hard master, who is disposed to punish them more than they deserve. And they never see the plague of their own hearts, until God sets home the divine law upon their consciences. They imagine they have some good desires, some right motives, and really mean well in what they do to please God and secure his favor. But when the commandment comes, which requires disinterested love, and condemns all selfish affections, desires, and conduct, they find they have done nothing but sin all their days, and that their hearts are full of evil. It is by the law, that God gives them the knowledge of sin. Paul says, he had not known sin, except the law had said, "Thou shalt not covet," that is, thou shalt not be selfish. As soon as God makes sinners see, that all selfishness is sin, they cannot help seeing, that they have always lived to themselves, and not unto God; that they have always loved themselves supremely, and never exercised any holy love to God, to their neighbor, or to themselves. The perfect law of God condemns all their internal exercises, and external conduct. Hence the apostle says, "What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." When God causes sinners to see the extent and spirituality of his holy law, they find they are dead in trespasses and sins, without holiness, and justly condemned for everything they have said, and done, and thought, and felt. Their sins revive, and appear astonishingly numerous, as well as exceedingly great and aggravated. They become convinced, that they have a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. It was through the medium of the law, that Paul was thoroughly convinced of the entire corruption of his heart, and of the justice of God in his condemnation. "But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good;

that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." Sinners may be awakened through fear of the penalty of the divine law; but they are never under genuine convictions, until they see the justice of the law, in requiring perfect obedience, upon pain of eternal death.

3. It is through the medium of the law, that God reconciles awakened and convinced sinners to himself. They are opposed to him entirely on account of his vindictive justice, which he has expressed in the penalty of his law. They hate God, because he will reign over them, and is disposed to punish them according to their deserts. They would have no sensible opposition to God on account of any of his perfections, if it were not for his justice, which arms all his other attributes against them. But until they are reconciled to his justice, they cannot be truly reconciled to any part of his great and amiable character. Their enmity to his justice must be slain, and it can be slain only through the medium of the law. The moment God causes them to love the justice of that law which they had before hated, they became reconciled to Himself. All their opposition to him ceases, the moment they love his law, as holy, just, and good. As they opposed him solely on account of the justice of his law, so as soon as they love the justice of his law, their enmity is slain, their opposition dies, and they become reconciled to God in that very respect in which they had been opposed to him. This is the very act of turning, or the very essence of conversion. Sinners do not begin to turn to God, until their enmity is slain by the divine law, and they see and love its perfection. Then as in a glass they behold the glory of God, and are changed into his moral image. It is only in the view and in the love of the divine law, that God can, to speak with reverence, reconcile sinners to himself; and a cordial reconciliation to God is necessarily implied in a sound conversion.

4. It is through the medium of the law, that God reconciles sinners to Christ. They must be reconciled to God, before they will be reconciled to Christ; they must be reconciled to the law, before they will be reconciled to the gospel. Accordingly, the law is said to be the "school-master to bring us unto Christ." Said Christ, "Every man that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me." As soon as sinners are reconciled to the law that condemns them, they renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and are prepared to feel their perishing need of Christ, and to trust in him alone for pardon and eternal life. Said Paul, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the

tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. To them who love the law by which they are condemned, Christ must be precious, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour. When sinners love the law by which they are condemned, they cannot be willing to be saved in any other way than through the atonement of Christ, which displays the very justice, that God might have displayed in punishing them forever. But when they see that God can be just, and yet pardon and save them through the redemption of Christ, they ardently desire to be received into the divine favor, and to rejoice in his pardoning mercy forever.

5. It is through the medium of the divine law that God causes believers to live a life of universal obedience. As soon as they love the law, they love to obey it. They make the perfect law of God the rule of their conduct, and endeavor to walk agreeably to it. Paul said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." David said to God, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. I love thy commandments above gold, yea above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." As God begins a good work in the hearts of believers through the law, so he carries it on through the same medium. Through the law he binds them to universal obedience, and condemns them for disobedience. Through the law he leads them to repentance. And through the law he leads them to look to Christ every day for the pardon of their daily offences. It is through the law that they see the grace of God in awakening, convincing, and converting them, and in every step he has taken to prepare them for his service and enjoyment forever. It is through the medium of the law that God begins, carries on, and completes the salvation of sinners, or prepares them for the inheritance of the saints in light. The law of perfection never has been, and never will be repealed, abated, or abolished, but remain in its full force and obligation upon all who are finally saved or lost. It will be a

mirror in which saints will forever see their own guilt, and God's astonishing and discriminating grace in their salvation.

HEADS OF THE IMPROVEMENT.

1. If God converts sinners through the medium of the law, as has been shown, then it is as proper, necessary, and useful to preach to sinners, and use all the means of grace with them before they are converted, as afterwards. All means produce their effects through a divine influence, and just such effects as God pleases. God's word always accomplishes the purpose of God.

2. If it be only through the medium of the law that God converts sinners, then we see why so many entertain false hopes under the preaching of the gospel. It is because they form their hopes before they have been slain by the divine law.

3. If God converts sinners through the law, then true submission is necessarily implied in a sound conversion. But where does it come in? Answer. In cordial reconciliation to the penalty of the law.

4. If God converts sinners through the medium of the law, then it can answer no good purpose to preach the gospel without the law, or to gospelize the law.

5. If God converts sinners through the medium of the law, then all true converts will love the doctrines of the gospel when they understand them. All the doctrines of the gospel are pleasing to those who love the law.

6. If sinners are converted through the law, in the manner that has been described, then we learn why secure sinners despise the gospel. It is because the divine law has not been brought home to their hearts and consciences; and they are ignorant of the plague of their own hearts.

7. If God converts sinners through the medium of the divine law, then it is easy for him to convert whom and when he pleases. He can set home the divine law upon the mind of any one. He did upon that of Paul—upon that of the malefactor—the jailer—the three thousand on the day of Pentecost.

8. This subject calls upon all to inquire whether they have been converted. Has the commandment come? Let saints pray that God would cause his holy law to convert the unconverted.

SERMON XXVII.

THE DUTY OF SINNERS TO PRAY FOR PARDON.

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."—Is. lv. 6, 7.

Isaiah has often been called the evangelical prophet, because he says more about Christ, and the peculiar privileges of the gospel, than any other of the prophets. He certainly begins this chapter in very evangelical strains. He cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Having made these free and universal offers of mercy to sinners, the prophet calls upon them to pray for them, assuring them that they shall certainly be heard. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." These words are expressly addressed to sinners in distinction from saints. They point out the immediate duty of sinners in their native state of alienation and distance from God. In order, therefore, that they may feel the weight and importance of this pointed and tender address to them, I shall show,

I. When God may be properly said to be near to sinners.

II. What is implied in their praying for pardoning mercy.

And,

III. That God will hear their prayers for pardon and forgiveness.

I. Let us consider when God may be properly said to be near to sinners. There is an important sense in which he is *always* near them. In him they live, and move, and have their being. He constantly surrounds them by his essential presence, which fills heaven and earth, and all places every moment. David was deeply impressed with this idea when he exclaimed, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." In this sense, God is as near to saints as to sinners, and as near to sinners at one time as another. But in the text the prophet plainly intimates, that there is a sense in which God is nearer to sinners at one time, than at another. He directs them "to call upon him while he is near," which plainly implies there are times or seasons in which he is more especially and peculiarly near to them. The question before us is, when do sinners realize this peculiar nearness of the Deity? They do not *always* realize it. Some say in their hearts, "there is no God." Some say in their hearts, "the Lord hath forsaken the earth." Some live without God in the world, and he is "not in all their thoughts." It is true of sinners, in general, that they commonly live without a realizing sense of God's nearness to them. But when he is near to them in the sense of the text, they do realize his nearness, otherwise they could not understand nor obey the injunction, to call upon him *while he is near.* He may, therefore, be said to be near them, when he makes them realize his nearness. He can open their eyes to see him whenever he pleases. He can come near to them in his providence, and cause them to realize the operations of his hand. He can throw them into such circumstances of trouble, sorrow, and distress, as constrain them to realize their dependence on him, and his frowns upon them. He can throw a cloud over all their earthly hopes and prospects, and sink them in despondency which shall effectually open their eyes to see him, their ears to hear him, and their mouths to call upon him. He said he would take this method to awaken his people of old out of their stupidity. "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." God has often awakened sinners by a bed of sickness, or by a sore bereavement, or by some other frown of providence.

But when such external means fail of producing the desired effect, he can employ more effectual internal means to alarm their fears and awaken their consciences. He can give energy to his word, and make it like a fire and a hammer, to wound their hard, unfeeling hearts, and cause them to realize that they are in his holy and sovereign hand, who is able to save, or destroy. But whether by his word, or providence he awakens sinners to see their danger and guilt, then is the time when he may properly be said to be *near* to them, in the sense of the text. This peculiar nearness of God they always sensibly and painfully feel, and are conscious, that it is their imperious duty to call upon him for pardoning mercy. We are next to consider,

II. What is implied in their praying to God while he is near for pardon and forgiveness. This they are commanded to do. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." To seek the Lord and to call upon him, are phrases of the same import, and denote the same as praying to him. And what ought a sinner, who feels himself under a sentence of condemnation, to pray for in particular? The second branch of the text tells him. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Sinners, who are conscious that they are under a sentence of condemnation, must feel conscious, that it is not only their duty to pray, but to pray for *pardoning mercy* in particular. And their praying sincerely and acceptably for this great and distinguishing mercy without which they must perish, implies,

1. Their forsaking all their evil ways and thoughts. Some walk in evil ways, which seem right to them, and which are highly esteemed among men, when they are really the ways of death. Many others walk openly and knowingly in forbidden paths, which lead to ruin. But every wicked man walks in some wicked way which is agreeable to his wicked heart, and for which he ought to judge and condemn himself. Not only the worst, but the best external actions of sinners flow from an evil heart, which renders them sinful and displeasing in the sight of God. By whatever means God opens the eyes of sinners to see their lives, they are convinced that they need an external reformation, and must forsake their evil ways, in order to return to God, and sincerely ask for his forgiving grace. Accordingly we find, that all gross transgressors who are awakened to see their guilty and dangerous state, always do feel as much constrained to forsake their evil ways, as to

call upon God. So long as they continue to pray for mercy, they continue to refrain from pursuing any of their past wicked ways. But while they reform externally, they may be far from reforming internally, which is no less necessary in order to pray acceptably for pardoning mercy. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*," says the text. The thoughts of awakened sinners are very different from their thoughts before they were awakened. Then their minds were full of worldly and vain thoughts, but when they are awakened, God is in all their thoughts when they lie down and when they rise up, when they go out, and when they come in; and all their thoughts about God are extremely sinful. While God is near them, and manifesting himself to them as a holy, sin-hating and sin-revenging God, and absolutely sovereign in the dispensations of his pardoning mercy, every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts, is extremely hostile and malignant towards him. They think hard of him for giving them a law, which requires more than they can perform, and threatens more than they deserve. They think hard of him for condemning their best services, and disregarding their most ardent cries for mercy. They think hard of him for forming his purposes concerning them before they existed, for saving others no better than themselves. They have not only such hard thoughts of God, but selfish thoughts, which are no less criminal. They desire God should regard them more than his own glory and the good of the whole universe. They desire, that God would save them at all events, whether it be for the glory of God and good of the universe or not. Their happiness weighs more in their hearts, than the happiness, or misery of any or all other beings. It gives them no satisfaction to tell them that God knows what is wisest and best, and will do what is wisest and best with them. They are so selfish, that they can see no reason for submission to divine sovereignty, in respect to their salvation. Such are the hard and selfish thoughts every unrighteous man has of God; and these thoughts he must forsake and entirely give up, in order to pray sincerely and acceptably to God for pardoning mercy. Such thoughts of the sinner under sensible condemnation, are an abomination to God, and so long as he retains and cherishes them, all his prayers must be an abomination.

2. Sinners must freely and cordially return to God, from whom they have unreasonably revolted, before they can pray properly for forgiveness at the hands of their injured and offended Sovereign. They have hated and rebelled against him, and departed from him without any just cause, and it becomes

them humbly and penitently to return to him, before they can sincerely and acceptably ask for his pardoning mercy. So the prophet says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him *return* to the Lord." Sinners who have been disobedient and disaffected to God, have reason to loathe and abhor themselves for their disaffection and disobedience, and to become cordially reconciled to his character, his law, and government. They should return to God, as the penitent prodigal returned to his father, justifying his father and condemning himself. God requires sinners to return to him, before he returns to them. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord." Returning to God implies an *internal* as well as *external* reformation. And an internal reformation implies a radical change of heart towards God. When sinners are effectually alarmed in view of their danger and guilt, they are very willing to reform, and to renounce the world and the things of the world, that they may escape future misery and obtain future happiness. The prophet Micah represents the anxious sinner as saying, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Such are the feelings of anxious sinners, while they realize God is near them. They would give up anything or everything, and do anything and everything to save their souls, except giving God their hearts and being reconciled to him whom they hate; which he says is all he requires. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Such an humble, penitent returning to the Lord is implied in sincerely and acceptably seeking for mercy. Besides,

3. Anxious, inquiring sinners must not only reform externally and internally, and become cordially reconciled to God, but they must believe in Christ, who has made atonement for their sins, and rendered it consistent for God to show mercy to all penitent, believing, returning sinners. Neither reformation, nor love, nor repentance is a just ground of pardoning mercy. It is only for Christ's sake, that God can consistently forgive the sins of sincere penitents. Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." And Paul speaking of both Jews and Gentiles says, "For *through him* (that is Christ) we both have access by one

Spirit unto the *Father*." And again he said in the synagogue at Antioch, "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the *forgiveness of sins:* and by him all that *believe* are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Thus reformation, reconciliation to God, and faith in Christ, are all implied in pleading acceptably for pardoning mercy at the hands of God. It is of great importance that anxious, inquiring sinners should clearly and distinctly understand what they must do in order to obtain pardon and justification in the sight of God. They are extremely apt to think, that mere external reformation will answer, and are sometimes told so. But if that will not answer, they confidently expect what they are often confidently told, that if they seek, and strive, and pray, their seekings and strivings and prayers, if persevered in, will certainly obtain the pardoning mercy of God, though they still hate and oppose him and the terms of salvation proposed in the gospel. But the prophet in the text has given a more proper, particular, and full answer to their anxious inquiry, "What must we do to be saved?" "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Let anxious, inquiring sinners, with such views and feelings, seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near, and they may justly expect he will hear and answer their prayers. It now remains to show,

III. That God will freely forgive all sinners who sincerely seek him in the manner that has been described. For,

1. In the first place, he loves all penitent, believing, returning sinners. They are reconciled to him, and he is reconciled to them. This they very often doubt. They have such a deep sense of their own sinfulness, vileness, and ill-desert, that they imagine he will not be reconciled to them, and graciously forgive their great, multiplied, and aggravated transgressions. It appears to them to be too great condescension and mercy in God, to become reconciled to them and adopt them into his family forever, after they have done so much to dishonor and displease him. So the penitent prodigal felt after he had become reconciled to his father, and resolved to return to him. He could not entertain the thought that his father would ever exercise paternal affection towards him, and treat him as a child, but only as an hired servant, which he was willing to

be. All penitent, believing, returning sinners exercise the same filial affection towards God, which that penitent did towards his father, and often have the same fear of not finding favor in his sight. But this betrays low and unworthy thoughts of the superlative grace of God. He assures all returning sinners that he will return to them. He declares, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart: and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "Thus saith the high and lofty One; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth." When Moses besought God to show him his glory, "The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." The same reconciliation, tenderness, and compassion towards penitent, returning sinners, God expresses in still plainer and stronger terms in the text. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Such plain, repeated, and strong assurances of God's readiness to pardon all penitent, believing, returning sinners, are designed to remove their doubts and fears, and to lead them to place an unshaken hope and confidence in his mercy, notwithstanding their great guilt and ill-desert. The pardoning mercy of God is abundant and boundless, and rises above all the ill-desert of humble, contrite, broken-hearted sinners. Their sense of their unworthiness serves to display the greatness and glory of God's pardoning mercy, and is a just ground of encouragement to pray for it. David esteemed it so, when he prayed for pardon. "For thy name sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." And the apostle says, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." All sinners may be assured, that as soon as they love God, he will love them, and delight to own them and bless them, as his children. They are then worthy of his love, and not before.

2. It is not only consistent with the *goodness*, but with the *justice* of God to pardon all penitent, believing, returning sinners. It has been observed, that while broken-hearted penitents are deeply impressed with a sense of their aggravated guilt and ill-desert, they are ready to doubt whether God has

goodness enough to forgive such guilty, ill-deserving creatures; but they are still more apt to doubt, whether God can consistently with his justice pardon their iniquities, and save them from that eternal death which is their due, and which he has threatened in his holy law. God is infinitely just, as well as infinitely merciful, and he cannot exercise his mercy inconsistently with his justice. This Adam saw as soon as he had sinned, and it threw him into despair. He knew he had transgressed the law and deserved to die, and saw no possible way to escape the death threatened and deserved. He fled from the presence of the Lord to escape his avenging hand. Though he knew that God was infinitely good, and that infinite goodness was full of mercy; yet he could not see how even infinite goodness and mercy could save him from the punishment he had deserved, consistently with the holy, vindictive justice of God. But as soon as God brought the seed of the woman, the promised Saviour into view, his despondency died and his hope of mercy was kindled in his breast. He repented and returned to God, and found mercy through the redemption of Christ. Penitent, broken-hearted sinners are often in the same predicament that Adam was before a Saviour was revealed. They love God, and hate sin, and judge and condemn themselves, and therefore fear that God will judge and condemn them, and cast them off forever, until they discover the way of salvation which God has provided and proposed in the gospel. Penitent, returning sinners often speak out the real views and feelings of their minds. They acknowledge that the character of God is amiable, and his law is holy, just, and good, and that they ought to love both; yet they fear God cannot pardon and save them, because they are such great sinners. Such fear arises entirely from their not having clear and just views of the ground of pardoning mercy, which is the atonement of Christ. On this ground God can pardon the greatest as well as the smallest penitent, returning sinner, consistently with his justice. Christ by his sufferings and death on the cross completely displayed his justice. This the apostle taught the Romans to believe. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness:—that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Every penitent, believing sinner shall be saved, notwithstanding all his unworthiness and guilt; for God is both willing and able to pardon and save such consistently with his love to holiness, and his hatred of sin, and disposition to punish it. While sinners in distress remain im-

penitent, their only fear is, that God is not good enough to pardon and save them; but when they become truly penitent and broken-hearted, they are more apt to fear, that God cannot forgive and save them, consistently with his *justice*, nor of course consistently with his glory. And as they *then love* him supremely, they cannot desire, that he should forgive and save them inconsistently with his glory, for they regard his glory more than their own good. But when they realize that Christ has died the just for the unjust, they desire that God would pardon and save them for his sake.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said, that there is a wide difference between praying for pardoning mercy, and praying for regenerating grace. God has promised to hear the prayers of penitent, believing, returning sinners for forgiveness; but he has never promised to hear the prayers of impenitent, unbelieving sinners for a new heart or regenerating grace. Such sinners are destitute of grace, and so long as they remain destitute of grace, they cannot sincerely pray for grace. They are still dead in trespasses and sins, and are under the entire dominion of a selfish heart, which is disaffected to God, to Christ, and to the holiness and happiness of heaven. Though they ardently desire to be saved from punishment, yet they do not sincerely desire to become holy and saved from sin. They are destitute of love to God, of repentance for sin, and of faith in Christ, and therefore cannot sincerely pray for that love to God which they hate, nor for that repentance which they hate, nor for that faith which they hate, nor consequently for that regeneration, in which love, repentance, and faith consists. They cannot sincerely desire regeneration before they become regenerate; for the same reason, that they cannot sincerely desire grace, before they have grace. God never hears the prayers of them that hate him, for love; nor the prayers of the impenitent, for repentance; nor the prayers of the unbelieving, for faith; but condemns their prayers for those holy affections, which he knows they hate. But it is the universal practice of awakened and distressed sinners to pray for grace, rather than for pardon, for holiness, rather than for forgiveness, and for regeneration, rather than for justification. God nowhere requires unregenerate sinners to pray for regeneration. If you search the Bible from beginning to end, you cannot find a single command, or even encouragement to unregenerate sinners to pray for regen-

eration or any holy affection; though there are a great many commands, encouragements, and promises made to praying for pardoning mercy. The text is a plain evidence of this. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him, while he is near;" for what? for regeneration? no; but for pardon on the ground of repentance; for it follows, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." There is no command here to pray unregenerately or impenitently, nor any encouragement given to pray unregenerately or impenitently; but full assurance given to penitent, believing, returning sinners that they shall find pardoning mercy. This distinction between praying for pardon, and praying for regeneration or a new heart, it is of great importance for all to understand; for it is really the same distinction as that between praying penitently, and impenitently. If sinners pray for regeneration, they must pray impenitently, and consequently must be rejected and condemned. But if they penitently and believingly pray for pardoning mercy, they shall certainly be heard and accepted. The insincere prayers of the unholy, unregenerate are an abomination in the sight of God; and if they ever so anxiously seek the Lord, while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near, without forsaking their evil ways and sinful thoughts, and heartily returning to the Lord from whom they have revolted, and sincerely praying for pardoning mercy, they will certainly be rejected and continue under condemnation.

2. It appears from what has been said, that it is not the first duty of sinners to pray for regeneration or any holy affection. It is very generally supposed to be the first duty of sinners to pray for regeneration, for love to God, for repentance of sin, for faith in Christ, for submission to divine sovereignty, and every other Christian grace. But this is contrary to reason, to conscience, and the whole word of God. Their first duty is to be regenerate, not to pray for regeneration; to love God, not to pray for love to him; to repent of sin, not to pray for repentance; to believe in Christ, not to pray for faith in him; to submit to God, not to pray for submission; to forsake their evil ways, not to pray that they may forsake them; to forsake their evil thoughts, not to pray that they may forsake them; to return to the Lord, not to pray that they may be turned; and to pray for pardon, not to pray that they may pray aright for pardoning mercy. Their duty to love God does not depend upon his making them willing to love him. Their duty to repent of

sin does not depend upon his making them willing to repent of sin. Their duty to believe in Christ does not depend upon his making them willing to believe in Christ. Their duty to submit to his sovereignty does not depend upon his making them willing to submit to his sovereignty. Nor does their duty to pray for pardoning mercy depend upon his making them willing to pray for it. But they endeavor to make themselves believe that their duty depends on his making them willing to do it; and desire and pray to be forgiven for not doing their duty, if he does not make them willing to do it. In this way they endeavor to evade their obligation to obey every divine command, and to cast the blame upon God, if he does not make them willing to obey him. That this is true, I will appeal to every impenitent sinner in this house, by reading the text as he would explain and understand it. Every impenitent sinner will acknowledge it is his duty "to seek the Lord, while he may be found," if he makes him willing to do it; "to call upon him, while he is near," if he makes him willing to do it; "to forsake his way," if he makes him willing to forsake it; to forsake his hard, selfish thoughts, if he makes him willing to forsake them; "to return unto the Lord," if he makes him willing to return unto him; and to seek and call upon his name for pardoning mercy, if he makes him willing to seek and pray for forgiving grace. But if he does not make him willing to do these things, he cannot do them, and it is not his duty to do them. I would now ask every impenitent sinner, whether it be not your secret opinion that your obligation to obey God depends upon his making you willing to obey him? In particular, do you not think your duty to awake out of stupidity depends upon God's awakening you? Do you not think your duty to love God depends upon his making you willing to love him? Do you not think your duty to pray for pardoning mercy, depends upon his making you willing to pray for it? And do you not justify yourself for the neglect of every duty, because God does not make you willing to do it? Thus sinners misconstrue and explain away the force and obligation of every command God has given them, in order to throw off all blame from themselves, and fix it upon him. These are the views, and feelings, and desires of impenitent sinners, when they pray either for regeneration, or for pardoning mercy; and must they not be extremely offensive to God, and can he hear them while they thus regard iniquity in their hearts?

3. It appears from what has been said, that it it is very dangerous to direct thoughtful, anxious sinners wrong in respect to duty. They are always disposed to direct themselves wrong.

They are desirous to be directed wrong. And many are disposed to direct them wrong. They are always solicitous to know what they must do to be saved; and especially what they must do in their present guilty, perishing condition. They know very well what the righteous must do. They must persevere in well-doing; but they want to know what sinners must do, who are unrighteous, unholy, and have not begun to do their duty. They imagine that they have some things to do before they love God, repent, and believe the gospel; and they want to know what those things are, for they feel ready to do anything and everything which will prepare them to love God, and comply with the terms of salvation, though they really hate God, and the terms of salvation which he has proposed in the gospel. It naturally occurs to them, that they must forsake their ways; that is, reform in respect to their external transgressions, and in respect to their neglect of external duties. But sensible there is still something wrong *within*, they begin to inquire of others, whether there is anything more for them to do than to reform externally. This they generally do before they make known their internal anxiety and distress, and inquire of others what they must do. They are generally told they must continue reforming, seeking, and striving. This is the very direction they desire, and for a time gives them some comfort, courage, and hope. But they soon get weary of seeking and striving without success, and begin to relax their exertions, and totally stifle all their fears and convictions, unless God revives and increases their distress; and then they are more anxious than ever to know what they must do. Their first directors now fail, and can say no more; and therefore it is evident that they have directed them wrong. But there is another and right way to direct them, and that is, not only to forsake their ways, and externally reform; but to forsake their hard, selfish, rebellious thoughts of God, and become cordially reconciled to his character, his law, and his government; to accept the punishment of their sins, and penitently and humbly accept of pardoning mercy through the atoning blood of Christ. If they dislike these directions, and say they cannot renounce their hard thoughts, nor become reconciled to God, nor cordially submit to the humiliating terms of the gospel, they must be told that unless they do submit, they will surely perish. This is the only proper and safe way of directing thoughtful, inquiring sinners. It is directing them to do their duty, and nothing else. In this way the prophets, Christ, and the apostles directed those who anxiously inquired what they must do to be saved. They never directed them to do anything in an unholy and sin-

ful manner. And ministers have no right to give any directions to sinners, but such as, if they do follow them, they shall certainly be saved. To give them any other directions, directly tends to lead them to destruction. But how many religious guides at this day do give them very different directions. This is true not only of some ignorant lay teachers, but of many who consider themselves, and are considered by others, as masters in our Israel. Notwithstanding all the light that has been thrown upon this serious, momentous subject, there are many who teach for doctrines the erroneous and dangerous traditions of men.

4. When God draws near to sinners in the manner that has been described, they are in a dangerous situation. His peculiar presence always disturbs their peace and alarms their fears. When they see God in his holiness, and sovereignty, they are troubled. They know not what to do. They cannot flee from his presence. They cannot hide themselves from his heart-searching eye. They cannot resist his power, nor get out of his hand. Though they once thought they loved him, they now find they hate him. Though they once thought they would submit to him, they now find their carnal mind rises in enmity and opposition to him. Though they once thought they would seek him, if they knew where to find him, and would call upon him, if he were near; yet they now find they are destitute of the spirit of grace and supplication. Though they externally draw near to God, they are conscious that their hearts are far from him. Though they have strong and ardent desires to be saved from punishment, they have no desires to be saved from sin. Though they desire above all things to escape from the wrath to come, yet they are conscious, that they have no desires to be holy and happy in heaven. They find their hearts are in perfect contrariety to the character and commands of God, to the dictates of their reason, and to the voice of conscience. They find themselves to be poor, and wretched, and miserable, and self-condemned. They find that they are hateful to God, hateful to saints, and hateful to themselves. They do not see how it is possible for them to be happy in this world, or in any other world. They feel as though they were fit for nothing but to be thrown away and perish. They find what God has said concerning them to be true, There is no peace to the wicked. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" A realizing sense of the presence of a sin-hating and sin-revenging God, throws sinners into the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. There is nothing that can save them from destruction, but the

sovereign mercy of God which they hate and abuse. He can save or destroy, and has a right to save or destroy, and there is none that can deliver out of his hand.

5. This subject now forces upon sinners the inquiry, whether God has not come near to them in some way or other. Has he not come to one and another of you, by his Spirit, and caused you to realize his presence? Has not a realizing sense of his presence alarmed your fears, and set your sins in order before you, and constrained you to see the plague of your own hearts? Has not God time after time striven with you by the secret influences of his Spirit, while reading or hearing his word? Has he not sometimes darted conviction into your consciences, and made you feel your guilty and perishing condition, and caused you to realize the danger of falling into his holy hands? Has he not sometimes destroyed your inward peace, and created within you an anguish and distress, which you have endeavored to conceal and stifle? But if God has not come near you by the secret strivings of his Spirit, has he not by his providence? Has he not come near you by the sickness and death of others? Has he not called you to stand around the sick, the dying, and dead? Has he not bereaved you of some of your nearest and dearest relatives, friends, or connections? Has he not lately been reading to you solemn lectures upon your own frailty, mortality, and duty of making your peace with him, and preparing for death and eternity? Has he not loudly called upon you to seek him while he may be found, and to call upon him, while he is near? Have you heard and obeyed the voice of providence? Have you called upon his name? Have you forsaken your ways, renounced your hard and sinful thoughts, and penitently returned to the Lord? Or have you only murmured and repined, and are you still standing and contending with your Maker? If any of you are in this guilty and dangerous condition, this subject points out your immediate and imperious duty; which is, not to wait for God to become reconciled to you before you are reconciled to him; not to wait for God to make you willing to become reconciled to him, but to become reconciled to him, before he is reconciled to you; not to wait for God to submit to you, but to submit to him, without the least delay or reserve. If God be near you, sincerely, and penitently, and believingly pray for pardoning mercy, and he will not reject the prayer, that flows from a penitent, contrite, broken heart.

6. It appears from what has been said, that God can come near to any sinners whenever he pleases. Though they are wandering, and loving to wander from him, and say in their

hearts, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" yet he can arrest them in their career, draw near to them, and make them realize his holy and awful presence. Who was ever at a greater distance from God in his own apprehension, than Manasseh for years? But God arrested him, while fleeing from him, and effectually taught him his guilt, his danger, and his duty. Though thoughtless, stupid sinners imagine, that they are out of the sight, and out of the reach of God, and feel secure in walking in the way of their heart and in the sight of their eyes; yet God can meet and arrest them whenever and wherever he pleases, and lay them prostrate at his footstool, in anguish and distress. He has come near to some in his providence, and will he not come near to others by his Spirit? Will he suffer truth to be rejected, and mercy to be despised, and sinners to ruin themselves? Is it not time for him to arise and plead his own cause? Will he not hear the prayer of the humble? Let them prove the Lord, whether he will not open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. Do you not need to be reformed? and must you not reform before God will hear your prayers?

SERMON XXVIII.

MERCY TO BE ASKED WITH SUBMISSION.

"And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live."—1 Kings, xx. 31, 32.

Ben-hadad, with thirty confederate kings, led a large army to Samaria, and besieged the city. But before he made his attack, he sent and demanded of Ahab king of Israel, to give up his regal authority and personal property, and submit to his government as the terms of peace. With this demand Ahab promised to comply; but this concession served only to increase the ambition and avarice of Ben-hadad, who sent another message to Ahab, and demanded the government and wealth of his whole kingdom. But Ahab, upon advice of his privy council, refused to comply with such an unreasonable and exorbitant price of peace. This brought on a battle in which Ahab gained the victory. The Syrians, however, were not discouraged by their defeat, but immediately concerted a plan for another campaign the next year. This plan they accordingly pursued, and pitched another battle with Ahab in which he again conquered, and slew in one day an hundred thousand Syrians, and dispersed the rest of the army. Ben-hadad was now reduced to an extremely wretched condition. In this helpless and hopeless state, his servants advised him to sue for mercy at the hands of Ahab the conqueror. Sensible that he had been the aggressor in the war with Ahab, and had justly forfeited his life, he yielded to the advice of his servants to go to Ahab and plead for mercy, with proper tokens of penitence and submission. "And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard

that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live." Sackcloth was the usual token of penitential sorrow, and this they put on to signify Ben-hadad's penitence towards Ahab; and the ropes they put on their heads were a significant badge of guilt and just desert of death. By these badges, Ben-hadad acknowledged that he had forfeited his life, and had no claims to mercy at the hands of Ahab, and therefore penitently and unconditionally submitted himself to his absolute disposal, to save, or take away his life. The mere light of nature taught him the duty and propriety of asking for mercy with unconditional submission. Though he was a heathen, and knew not the gospel condition of pardon; yet his reason and conscience taught him, that he ought to ask for pardoning mercy unconditionally; and this is the universal dictate of reason and common sense, in respect to asking for pardon at the hand of man. But how much more reasonable is it, that sinners should penitently and unconditionally ask for pardoning mercy at the hand of God? Hence every person of every capacity must see,

That it always becomes sinners to ask for the pardoning mercy of God, with unconditional submission.

To illustrate this practical and important truth, I shall,

I. Explain mercy.

II. Explain submission.

III. Show that it always becomes sinners to ask for the pardoning mercy of God, with unconditional submission.

1. Let us consider what we are to understand by divine mercy. The whole of God's moral character may be comprised in love. And this is what the apostle means when he says, "God is love." But the love of God may be exercised towards different objects, and on that account, may be distinguished into different moral attributes or perfections. God's disposition to make innocent creatures happy, is called goodness; his disposition to make guilty creatures miserable, is called justice; and his disposition to forgive and save sinful creatures from deserved punishment, is called mercy or grace. Since all these moral perfections flow from the same divine benevolence, they cannot be said to be contrary to or inconsistent with each other; yet they are totally distinct and diverse in respect to the effects they produce on different objects. God may be said to be good, in bestowing favors upon the innocent. He may be said to be

just, in inflicting punishment upon the guilty. But in relieving, pardoning, and saving the guilty from deserved punishment, he may be said to be merciful or gracious. Mercy always implies demerit or ill-desert in the object of it. No person can be the proper object of mercy, who does not deserve to be punished in point of justice. This was the very idea which Ben-hadad and his servants formed of mercy in the kings of Israel. They supposed the kings of Israel possessed the spirit of the God whom they professed to worship, and therefore merciful as the God of Israel was merciful; that is, ready to spare the lives of those who had forfeited their lives, if they penitently and submissively plead for pardoning mercy. These heathens viewed human mercy in this light; and the bare light of nature teaches every one to form the same idea of mercy in God, as a kind of gracious disposition, which prompts him to pardon, forgive, and save sinners from the punishment they deserve, when they penitently and properly pray for his sovereign mercy. I proceed,

II. To show what is implied in pleading for the sovereign mercy of God, with submission. If mercy has been justly described it is easy to see, that asking for it, always carries in it the idea of submission, which is not implied in asking for justice. Men may demand justice, but they must plead for mercy. The question now is, what is implied in pleading submissively for mercy at the hands of God. Here then I would observe,

1. To plead submissively for mercy before God, implies a desire to be freed from that everlasting punishment, which God has threatened to inflict upon sinners for their disobedience to his holy and righteous commands. He has told them, that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die;" that "the wages of sin is death;" and that "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." For those who are under such a sentence of condemnation to plead for mercy, is to express their desire, that they may be forever freed from this condemnation, and restored to the forfeited favor of God. And since they have heard by the gospel, that God is merciful, and can consistently forgive and save the guilty and ill-deserving, they may and ought to plead with him to show mercy. To escape misery and to enjoy happiness, is in its own nature desirable; and to escape eternal misery and to enjoy eternal happiness, is infinitely desirable and important. Sinners may, therefore, ardently desire and importunately plead for the great salvation which God has provided, and of which they stand in perishing need. And their pleading for mercy al-

ways implies their sincere and ardent desires to be saved from the wrath to come. When Ben-hadad plead for mercy at the hands of Ahab, he said, "I pray thee, let me live." When sinners in Christ's day plead for mercy, they expressed their ardent desires for future and eternal life. Pleading always implies desire, and even strong desire, for we never plead for anything but what appears to us very precious and important. When temporal, or eternal life lies at stake, this is an object which men will fervently plead for, because it appears unspeakably precious and important. And when guilty, perishing sinners plead for eternal life before God, they cannot too ardently desire the inestimable blessing they implore. But,

2. To plead for this mercy submissively, implies a willingness to be denied the bestowment of it. To ask for mercy without being willing to be denied, is the same thing as to ask for justice. Mercy is in its own nature sovereign, and may be granted, or denied, as God sees best. This Ben-hadad significantly acknowledged, by putting sackcloth on his loins, and a rope on his head, when he went to plead for mercy before the king of Israel. Though he most ardently desired that Ahab would let him live; yet he voluntarily put his life into Ahab's hand, practically saying he might hang him up as a monument of justice, or spare his life as a monument of sovereign mercy. It belongs to God to have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will to destroy. Unless sinners see that they have broken the divine law, that they deserve to suffer the penalty which the law threatens, and that God would be just and amiable in executing the penalty upon them, they cannot ask for mercy, with submission. It would have been a solemn mockery for Ben-hadad, with sackcloth on his loins, and a rope on his head, to have said to Ahab, "I pray thee, let me live," if he had not meant to ask for mercy, and not for justice. And it would be still more absurd and criminal for sinners to plead for mercy before God, while they are determined to contend with the Almighty to all eternity, if he will not show them mercy. A sincere request to God for pardoning mercy, always implies a sincere submission to a denial. No sinner knows beforehand that God can consistently save him in particular, and therefore cannot know but that God is bound in wisdom as well as justice to deny his request; and if God be bound to deny his request, his very request implies a cordial submission to a denial. These two exercises of heart are not only consistent, but involve each other. A proper desire to receive any favor at the hand of God, implies a real willingness to be denied. Our Saviour ardently prayed that the cup of

suffering on the cross might pass from him; but at the same time felt and said, "Father, not my will, but thine be done." If it were consistent for Christ to plead thus with his Father, it is far more proper and consistent for sinners to plead for mercy at the hand of God, with entire submission to a denial. It is utterly impossible for any one to ask God for any favor submissively, without being willing that God either should grant or deny his request, as seems good in his sight. Such a willingness is essential to true submission. Having explained the nature of mercy, and the nature of submission, I proceed to the last thing proposed,

III. To show that penitent sinners always feel the propriety of asking for divine mercy submissively. Whether Ben-hadad pleaded for mercy at the hand of Ahab penitently or impenitently, submissively or unsubmissively; yet he significantly professed to be both penitent and submissive. He put on the badges of repentance, and the language of his plea was submissive: "I pray thee, let me live." He saw the propriety of asking for pardoning mercy penitently and submissively. He practically said to Ahab, to whom he had forfeited his life, "Here I am, a guilty, ill-deserving creature; death is my due, and mercy is my plea; kill me, or spare me, just as you see fit, and I will justify your conduct, though I may deplore my fate." Now, all *penitent*, guilty sinners stand in the same situation in respect to God, that Ben-hadad stood in respect to Ahab; and accordingly they feel the propriety of asking for mercy with absolute submission. For,

1. They know they deserve to die. This knowledge they always derive from genuine conviction and godly sorrow for sin. Neither careless nor merely awakened sinners have this experimental knowledge of their ill-desert. Though they know that they have disobeyed God, and that God has threatened to punish every act of disobedience with eternal death; yet they are not willing to believe that their disobedience deserves eternal punishment. But when the commandment comes, it carries conviction to their conscience that they deserve the death to which they are condemned. Hence,

2. They know that God may justly give them the due reward of their deeds, and make them completely and forever miserable. Their mouths are stopped, and they stand guilty and self-condemned before God. They realize that they ought to judge and condemn themselves, as the divine law judges and condemns them; and to repent and pray penitently and submissively for pardoning mercy through faith in the divine Redeemer. Their consciences, in spite of their hearts, constrain

them to feel and say, that God would be amiable and glorious in banishing them from his blissful presence, and consigning them to a state of everlasting alienation and separation from holiness and happiness. Yet,

3. They know that God is infinitely merciful, and takes no pleasure in the death of sinners, but sincerely desires, simply considered, to make them the monuments of his pardoning mercy. This encourages them to plead for pardon and salvation. It was a belief in Ben-hadad, that the king of Israel was a merciful king, that prompted him to throw himself at his feet and plead for mercy. So it is the known mercy of God that encourages guilty, self-condemned, penitent sinners to prostrate themselves before God, and plead for forgiving grace. They know that they ought to desire deliverance from future and eternal misery, and the enjoyment of future and eternal happiness. And since they know that God can consistently bestow these rich blessings upon some of the guilty and perishing children of men, they know they ought sincerely and ardently to desire that he would make them the subjects of his rich, discriminating grace. They know it is their duty to pray for salvation through the mediation of Christ, for whose sake he can grant it consistently with his justice. But nevertheless,

4. They do not know whether the glory of God will require him to display his *mercy*, or his *justice* towards them in particular. They know that he has told them he determines to make some sinners vessels of his wrath, and some vessels of his mercy; or that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he pleases he will harden and destroy. It is impossible for any sinners to know, in the state of nature, whether God will make them vessels of mercy, or vessels of wrath. They know not what God's will is respecting their future and eternal state. This makes them sensible of the propriety of their praying for mercy in absolute submission to divine sovereignty. When they become true penitents they love God supremely, and regard his glory more than their own good. Of course they feel that they ought to pray penitently and submissively for that mercy which God has a right to deny, and which they ought to be willing he should deny, if his glory requires him to deny it. This is the dictate of the reason and conscience of every penitent sinner, who sees the nature of sin, and the glory of divine justice. If he should justify himself, his own mouth would condemn him; if he should plead for mercy without submission, he would be conscious to himself that he ought to be denied. Every true penitent knows in his own conscience that he ought to resign himself into the sover-

eign hands of God, and pray for mercy with unreserved submission. The prodigal son became a penitent, and when he repented, he judged and condemned himself, and resolved to plead for his father's forgiveness with a truly submissive spirit. He spontaneously said to himself, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He freely acknowledged that he had entirely forfeited his father's favor, and presumed not to be asked to be restored to his former rank in his father's family. The publican that went up to the temple to pray, had the same sense of his guilt and unworthiness, and submissively cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." I ask for mercy, not for justice. Justice would destroy me, and nothing but mercy can save me; and if this mercy be denied, I ought not, and will not complain. This was the sincere language of his true penitence and submission. The penitent malefactor is another instance, which discovers the dictates of reason and conscience, in respect to the proper manner of pleading for pardoning mercy. He first acknowledged the justice of his condemnation, and then turns to the suffering Saviour, and says, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." He seems to feel too guilty and unworthy to ask for mercy in plain terms, and only implicitly expresses a desire to be saved from the miseries of the damned, and admitted to the joys of the blessed. All penitent sinners know what justice is, and what mercy is, and how to plead for mercy instead of justice. Though they love both mercy and justice, yet they know the vast difference between these two attributes, and the different effects they produce. Their knowledge of justice gives them the knowledge of mercy, and their knowledge of both impresses on their minds the propriety of pleading for mercy, and of pleading for it with entire submission. They know that they ought to go to God as Ben-hadad went to Ahab, and first submit to justice, and then plead for mercy.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from the nature of mercy and the nature of submission, that unconditional submission to God in the exercise of grace to the guilty, is one of the plainest doctrines and duties of the gospel. It is level to the lowest capacity. A heathen, or child may clearly understand it by the bare light of nature. Ben-hadad and his servants understood it, and pro-

fessed to practice it. They acknowledged they deserved to die for their conduct towards Ahab. They acknowledged he had a right to spare their lives, or to put them to death, and they plead for mercy with unreserved submission to his sovereignty, to spare, or take away their lives. A child seven years old, who has committed a fault, and deserves to be punished, understands the duty of unconditional submission, and if he is sorry for his fault, he will readily confess it, and cry submissively to his offended father to forgive his offence, and spare him from deserved correction. The doctrine of unconditional submission to God in his dispensations of grace is as capable of a plain moral demonstration, as any mathematical proposition is of a mathematical demonstration. Every person ought to exercise unconditional submission to the known will of God. It is the known will of God, to save one sinner, and not another; therefore it is the duty of every sinner to be willing that God should save another sinner and not himself, if that be his wise, benevolent, eternal, and immutable purpose. Is not this doctrine of unconditional submission as plainly and demonstrably true, as that two and two are equal to four? Whoever admits the premises must admit the consequence. And who will deny the premises? Who will say that God has not determined to save a part and not the whole of mankind? Who will say his determinations are not wise and good? Or who will say it is not the duty of the creature to submit to the will of his Creator? Much has been said by the learned, the great, and the good, against unconditional submission to the sovereignty of God in the dispensations of his grace. They have represented the doctrine as unintelligible, inconsistent, and absurd. It is certainly plain and intelligible to a heathen, a Jew, a Christian, or a child. It is as consistent as it is intelligible. Sinners deserve to be punished. God has a right to punish them or not to punish them. It is consistent for him to punish them or not to punish them. And it is consistent for them to be willing that he should punish them, or not punish them. This is precisely the same as the exercise of unconditional submission. This doctrine is said to be absurd, because it implies a willingness to be not only a miserable, but a sinful creature forever. But where is the absurdity of this? Those who are saved, must be willing that those who are lost should be not only miserable, but sinful forever. They must see them placed at the left hand of Christ at the last day. They must hear Christ pronounce a sentence of final and eternal condemnation upon them; and they must see them go away into everlasting punishment. They must see the smoke of their torments rise up

forever and ever, and in this view of it, they must sing "Amen; Alleluia." They must then be willing that they should not only suffer, but sin forever. But how can they be willing that God should cause them to suffer and sin forever, if they were never willing that God should have caused them to suffer and sin forever? The truth is, God prepared them for the day of judgment, before he admitted them to heaven, by making them willing in the day of his power, to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb over the finally incorrigible and miserable. He has always made the subjects of his special grace pass through a process similar to the day of judgment. Moses, by divine direction, placed six tribes of Israel on mount Gerizim, and six on mount Ebal. He then commanded the priests to read the curses of the law against all transgressors in the hearing of all the twelve tribes, and commanded them to say at the close of every curse, Amen; and the last curse runs in this solemn form: "Cursed be that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them: and all the people shall say, Amen." Every one that made this declaration, publicly professed unconditional submission to the sovereignty of God in making him suffer the penalty of the divine law, the proper wages of sin, if he died an impenitent and incorrigible transgressor. Every sinner must, before he embraces the gospel, exercise such unconditional submission to divine sovereignty, in order to be prepared for the enjoyments and employments of heaven. If the Israelites were sincere in their profession of submission to the curse of the law, they were willing that the curse of the law should be executed upon them. And if that penalty implied, (as it undoubtedly did) that they should be eternally sinners, they professed to submit to eternal sinfulness as well as to eternal suffering. It is absurd to make a distinction between sinners being willing that God should *dispose* of them forever, and being willing that God should make them *sinful and miserable* forever. To say the least, it is a great pity that men of ingenuity should attempt to puzzle men in respect to unconditional submission, which is one of the plainest, most practical, and important doctrines of the gospel.

2. If sinners ought to plead for mercy submissively; then ministers ought to direct them to plead for mercy, with unconditional submission. It is one of the principal branches of the ministerial office to direct sinners what they must do to be saved. This ministers know to be their duty, and their people ought to apply to them for religious instruction. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." But

many ministers do not teach sinners who are anxiously inquiring the way to obtain pardoning mercy, to plead for it submissively; because they do not believe that they ought to exercise unconditional submission to divine sovereignty. But it appears from what has been said, that sinners ought to exercise entire submission to the will of God, who has a right to save or destroy. And it must be owing to a want of knowledge, or want of faithfulness, if ministers do not teach the great and essential doctrine of unconditional submission. It is a reproach to any minister not to understand this doctrine, and a greater reproach not to preach it, if he does understand it. It is a melancholy truth which ought not to be concealed, that not a few very amiable and respectable ministers deny and preach against the doctrine of unconditional submission, and teach anxious and inquiring sinners to plead for mercy impenitently and unsubmissively. Awakened and convinced sinners find by reading the Bible, and attending to their own hearts, that they are totally depraved and justly condemned by the divine law, and required to repent and believe the gospel as the only ground of hope. But they are conscious, that they had rather perish, than comply with these hard conditions. The Bible affords them no light, nor hope. They anxiously apply to ministers to direct them to some better way than they find in the Bible, to escape divine wrath and obtain divine mercy. Those preachers that disbelieve the doctrine of unconditional submission, pity them in their depraved, guilty, perishing state, and endeavor to give them some relief. They direct them to read and pray, seek and strive to enter in at the strait gate, to wait at the pool for the moving of the waters, and to resolve to persevere in doing their duty as well as they can. These directions often give them some temporary relief, but directly tend to weaken and destroy their convictions and settle them down in a state of entire stupidity. But the divine Spirit may increase their convictions of their entire depravity, increasing guilt and danger, and lead them to renounce all they have done and been directed to do to save themselves, and bring them to commit their souls into the sovereign hand of God to save or destroy, with cordial and unconditional submission. They now ask and receive pardoning mercy, and enjoy peace in believing, but no thanks are due to their ignorant or unfaithful teachers.

3. If sinners ought to ask for mercy submissively; then they never ask aright until they are cordially reconciled to God, and are willing that he should act as a sovereign in granting or denying the mercy they ask. When they realize their guilty and wretched case, they never fail to plead for mercy, time after

time, with great importunity, and seem resolved to take no denial. But they still find, that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. This leads them to think hard of God, for disregarding their desires, their prayers, and their supposed duties. But they have no reason to complain, for they ask amiss. Their prayers and duties are all an abomination to God, who knows they would all the while fain flee out of his hands, instead of desiring to submit to his sovereignty. Their hearts are at variance with their convictions. They know, that they ought to love God, but they hate him; that they ought to justify him and condemn themselves, but they choose to justify themselves and condemn him; and that they ought to regard his glory more than their own good, but they regard their own good more than his glory and the good of the whole universe. All their selfish desires, prayers, and exertions, set them back instead of forward, and render them more and more deserving of that future and eternal misery which they dread, and are ardently desiring to escape. But they must draw near to God, before he will draw near to them. They must be reconciled to God, before he will be reconciled to them. They must plead submissively for mercy, before he will grant it.

4. If sinners ought to ask for divine mercy submissively, then they are never under genuine conviction, until they feel this to be their duty. While they are entirely secure and stupid, they totally neglect calling upon God and pleading for mercy; but when they are awakened from stupidity, and alarmed at a sense of danger, they are apt to seek and strive for mercy, though they have but little sense of guilt and ill-desert in the sight of God. In this situation, they have no idea of the duty of unconditional submission. They feel able to do all they suppose is necessary to escape the wrath to come, and secure eternal life. They think they can reform and do their duty so well that God will be pleased with them, and freely forgive all their transgressions, and entitle them to future and eternal happiness. But if their awakenings lead to convictions, they find that load of guilt and obstinacy of heart which involves them in darkness and despondency. They know not what to do to break the cords of their iniquity, by which they feel themselves bound over to unavoidable destruction. Then, notwithstanding all their enmity and opposition to God, they feel that they ought to renounce their groundless enmity and opposition, and submissively plead for mercy. But sinners often think they are under convictions, and are thought to be by others under convictions, while they have no thought that

they deserve to suffer the penalty of the divine law, and ought to be willing that God should execute it upon them, if he sees best. Direct them to exercise unconditional submission to divine sovereignty, and they will rise and contend with their Maker with malignity and bitterness. They say they cannot submit, they ought not to submit, it would imply a willingness to disobey God forever to submit. Such is the language of a sinner's heart before genuine convictions; but under genuine convictions his mouth is stopped, and both reason and conscience tell him he ought to plead, with unconditional submission, for that mercy which God may justly refuse to bestow. It requires great wisdom, prudence, and faithfulness in ministers, to deal plainly with awakened sinners, and tell them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. No unrenewed sinners love to hear the plain truth, but "say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." It is, however, extremely criminal and dangerous for ministers to gratify sinners by daubing with untempered mortar, and leading them to build their eternal hopes upon a false and sandy foundation. But how seldom are they taught their duty to accept the punishment of their iniquity, and penitently and submissively plead for that mercy to which they have no claim, and may be justly denied? It is said, that these truths ought not to be preached at any time, and especially in a time of uncommon attention; because they are discouraging to awakened sinners, and tend to raise the enmity of the human heart. But it is impossible to convince sinners of the plague of their own hearts, without inculcating the doctrine of unconditional submission, for there is no other doctrine but this, that they refuse to embrace, in order to escape future and eternal misery. Only leave this doctrine out of view, and it is easy to make converts of awakened sinners. They will rejoice to be told, that they may truly embrace the gospel, and retain their carnal mind, which is enmity to God, and not subject to the penalty of the divine law, neither indeed can be. If I have been rightly informed, and I believe I have been, some of the most noted preachers of the present day have either disbelieved, or neglected to preach the doctrine of unconditional submission, and taught anxious and inquiring sinners not to believe it, and assured them that they might become true penitents and sound believers, while they hated and opposed it. If this be not handling the word of God deceitfully and dangerously, I am greatly mistaken. I feel it to be my duty to

warn all sinners against this fatal delusion, and especially when they are anxiously concerned about their future state.

5. It appears from what has been said, that it is much easier to direct inquiring sinners right in respect to their present, pressing duty, than it is to direct them wrong. Those who understand the nature of mercy and the nature of submission, find no difficulty in pointing out how sinners should plead for mercy properly and successfully. They have only to follow the plain example of the apostles. Many anxious sinners besought them to direct them what they must do to be saved. I will mention two or three very remarkable instances. The first is in the second chapter of Acts. Peter said in his sermon, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ;" that is, an absolute Sovereign. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, *what shall we do?*" If Christ be a sovereign he has a right to save or destroy. "Then Peter said unto them, *Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." These were very plain, intelligible, and pertinent directions; and three thousands gladly followed them, and received pardoning mercy. When Simon the sorcerer found himself in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, Peter directed him "to repent of his wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him." That is, to pray with submission to God to grant or deny his pardoning mercy. When the Jailer was alarmed and trembled in the view of destruction, he brought Paul and Silas out of the prison, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It seems that he followed their direction, believed, and was baptized and was saved. The apostles found no difficulty in directing sinners right, in their most anxious and distressed situation. They directed them to pray, and to pray *penitently* and *submissively* for pardoning mercy. And sinners found no difficulty in understanding their directions, and when they followed them, they found no difficulty in obtaining pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. Ministers who understand the character of sinners, the character of God and the terms of the gospel, find no difficulty in directing inquiring, distressed sinners right; and sinners find no difficulty in understanding their directions. They never go away and say, that they were directed not to pray, because they were directed to pray submis-

sively, for their reason and conscience tell them that they ought to pray submissively, and that they ought to be, and will be denied sovereign mercy, if they do not exercise unconditional submission. But when ministers undertake to give inquiring sinners directions different from the example of the apostles, they find a difficulty to know what directions to give. They almost always give different and contradictory directions. They will generally direct them to pray. But if they ask how they must pray, they know not what to say. They will not presume to say, that they must pray wickedly, but only to pray as well as they can with their totally depraved hearts. But if they are asked, whether God will hear their impenitent, unsubmissive prayers, they dare not say that God will hear them. Hence, they go away as ignorant as when they came, and with increased anxiety ask the next minister, or the next Christian, what they must do? It is just as easy for sinners as for saints, to obtain mercy. Saints must go to God, as Ben-hadad went to Ahab, that is, with unconditional submission, in order to obtain any temporal, spiritual, or eternal favor from him. They must submit to a denial; and when they submit to a denial, they are prepared to receive mercy, and not before. God denies saints much oftener than he denies sinners their requests, for they pray much oftener than sinners generally do, unsubmissively, and are denied. But when either saints or sinners pray submissively, God always hears and answers their requests. It seems to be a very general opinion among ministers and others, that the same directions are not to be given to sinners, that are to be given to saints. But this is an unreasonable and unscriptural opinion, and leads both ministers and people into a great practical error. If there be any sinners here present, that anxiously desire to know how to obtain the pardoning mercy of God, I will give them a true and infallible direction. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Let no one think that this is no direction, or that it is a wrong direction, or that he can find mercy without follow-

SERMON XXIX.

THE MERCY OF CHRIST TO ENTREATING SINNERS.

"And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples, and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, sat by the highway-side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way."—Mark x. 46—52.

Bartimeus was a blind and poor man, and probably the son of a blind and poor man. He is called the son of Timeus, which seems to be mentioned as a circumstance that aggravated his blindness and poverty. If his father was blind and poor, then his blindness and poverty were both hereditary, and a good reason why he should sit by the highway side begging; and why both he and his father should be generally known in the city Jericho. Though Bartimeus was blind, yet he was not deaf, for he heard the noise of the multitude that followed Christ, when he left Jericho in his way to Jerusalem. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth that passed by, "he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." This was a precious opportunity to cry for mercy, for Christ was just going to leave him; and it was the only opportunity he ever expected to have, to gain the ear and excite the compassion of Christ, the son of David and Saviour of the world. Christ had just been preaching and working miracles, and was then going about doing good to the souls and bodies of men, and dispensing both temporal and spiritual blessings to poor, perishing, guilty creatures. If Bartimeus

had neglected to cry for mercy while Jesus was passing by, he might have died without mercy. And it seems that a sense of his critical situation excited his ardent desire and importunate cry for mercy. He felt that all his temporal and eternal interests lay at stake, and he determined to surmount all the difficulties in the way of gaining the attention and compassion of Christ. The more the multitude attempted to dissuade him from crying to Christ, the more a great deal he persisted in crying, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus heard his cry, called him to him, demanded his request, and then said, "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way." It appears from all the circumstances of the case, that he was healed of his natural and moral maladies; his sight was restored and his sins were forgiven; and his heart was united to Christ and disposed to follow him. This instance of Christ's conduct was recorded for the instruction and encouragement of sinners in all future ages, and forcibly teaches us this important truth;

That he is willing to bestow mercy upon all who sincerely plead with him for mercy. I shall show,

I. What is implied in sinners pleading for mercy; and,

II. That Christ is willing to show mercy to sincere suppliants.

I. I am to show what is implied in sinners sincerely pleading for mercy. And here it may be observed,

1. It implies that they renounce all claims upon justice to save them. They cannot plead for justice and mercy at the same time. Unless they realize that God would be just in destroying them, they cannot desire, nor sincerely ask for his pardoning mercy. If God could not justly punish them forever for transgressing his righteous law, then he is bound in justice to save them from future and eternal punishment. And so long as they feel that they do not deserve to suffer the penalty of his holy law which they have broken, they cannot plead for mercy to save them from the wrath to come. They must necessarily renounce all claims to justice, before they can sincerely ask for mercy. And a clear conviction of the entire corruption of their hearts and of the entire sinfulness of their lives, must constrain them to feel that they deserve to suffer the full penalty of the divine law, and that nothing but divine mercy can save them from it. As soon as they feel justly condemned for their sins, they cannot hope for pardon upon any other ground than mere mercy, which constrains them to plead for mercy. Thus the Publican was constrained to cry for

mercy. "God be merciful to me a sinner." Thus the prodigal was constrained to cry, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." And thus Paul was humbled to the dust by a sense of his guilt and ill-desert in the sight of God, before he cried to Christ for mercy, and begged to know what he would have him to do to secure his favor. Sinners must not only feel that they are exposed to destruction, but that they deserve destruction, before they can sincerely plead for mercy. It is one thing to plead to be spared from going down to the pit of destruction, and another to plead for a restoration to the forfeited favor of God. The devils could plead with Christ not to torment them, but they had no disposition to plead for future holiness and blessedness upon the self-abasing terms of the gospel. Sinners must not only see, that they are condemned by justice, but must cordially approve of the justice which condemns them, before they can sincerely plead for mercy.

2. Their pleading for mercy implies that they give up all claims to divine mercy, as well as to divine justice. Those who need mercy at the hands of Christ cannot claim his mercy. Though the innocent may claim justice, yet the guilty cannot claim mercy. Though Christ has suffered and died on the cross to atone for their sins, and can consistently show mercy, yet he is under no obligation to show them mercy. To plead for his mercy is a very different thing from claiming his mercy. Poor, blind Bartimeus did not claim the mercy of Christ, when he so ardently prayed, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." Sinners sometimes vainly imagine, that though they do not deserve to be saved in point of justice, yet they deserve to be saved in point of mercy. Since Christ can show mercy to them, through the atonement he has made, they imagine he ought to show them mercy, and that he has no right to deny them, and show mercy to others. But while they thus mistake mercy for justice, they cannot sincerely plead for mercy. When they sincerely plead for mercy they *mean* mercy and not justice; and feel that Christ has a right to deny them the mercy they plead for. When Bartimeus sat by the way-side begging of his fellow-men, he did not claim mercy from them, or suppose that they were bound to supply his wants; and much less when he begged of Christ to have mercy upon him, did he claim mercy at his hands. Had he claimed mercy, Christ would undoubtedly have left him to pine away in the blindness of his eyes and hardness of his heart. Christ knew that he meant mercy, when he cried for mercy, and therefore

he heard and granted his sincere request. So when sinners sincerely plead for mercy, they renounce all claim to it.

3. Their sincerely pleading for mercy implies that they plead submissively, or with a willingness that Christ should hear, or deny their plea, as seems good in his sight. When Moses prayed for the forgiveness of Israel, when they had made and worshipped the golden calf, he prayed submissively, and referred it to the sovereign mercy of God to forgive, or not forgive their sin, as he saw best. And when David was driven from his family, his throne and the ark of God, he said to Zadok, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." Whatever mercies men stand in need of, whether small or great, temporal or spiritual, and however much they stand in need of them, they ought to ask for them submissively, and be willing to be denied, if God sees fit to deny them. Unreserved submission is always implied in every sincere petition for mercy. Christ has a right to save, or to destroy sinners; and therefore they cannot sincerely ask him to save them, without cordially acknowledging his absolute sovereignty. They must cordially accept the punishment of their sins, in order to ask for that mercy which they have no right to claim.

4. Their sincerely asking Christ to show them mercy, implies that they ask in faith. Bartimeus prayed in faith for the mercy he desired Christ to bestow. "He cried, Jesus, *thou son of David*, have mercy on me." He believed that Christ was, in respect to his humanity, the son of David, the long-expected Messiah, the only Saviour of sinners. And it was in answer to this prayer of faith, that Christ granted him mercy. So he expressly told him. "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole." Luke speaks of Christ's saying more emphatically, "thy faith hath saved thee." He exercised saving faith in pleading for the mercy of Christ. And without faith in Christ, it is impossible to plead acceptably for pardoning mercy. Sinners must believe that Christ is the only and all-sufficient Saviour; that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, and that there is no other name besides his, given under heaven among men, whereby they can be saved. Christ's power to bestow pardoning mercy upon them, results entirely from the atonement he has made for them. They must therefore ask for mercy in the belief of his atonement as the only medium through which he can grant them pardoning

grace. To speak with reverence, Christ has no right to bestow pardoning mercy upon any but penitent, believing sinners. Christ acknowledged to his Father that his right to give eternal life, resulted from his having finished the work which he had given him to do. This supposes that his right to forgive sinners is founded in the atonement he has made for sin. Sinners therefore cannot sincerely plead with Christ to have mercy on them, without exercising faith in his atonement, as the sole ground of forgiveness.

I now proceed to show,

II. That Christ is willing to bestow mercy upon all sinners who thus believingly, penitently, and submissively plead for it. This will appear, if we consider,

1. How he treated sinners while he was upon earth. He was the friend of sinners, and openly appeared so, though he was reproached for it. He took pleasure in showing mercy to the poorest, the meanest and most wretched objects. He never refused to grant a favor, which he was properly requested to bestow. Matthew gives the following account of his extraordinary condescension, beneficence and mercy. He says, "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease, among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought unto him all sick people, that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those who were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them." In his public discourses, and in all his private intercourse with the people, he gave such striking manifestations of his kindness and mercy, that the hearers and spectators were constrained either to admire, or to reproach him for what he said and did. Some said, by way of reproach, "This man receiveth sinners," while others praised God for his benevolence and compassion. Now Christ is still the same gracious and compassionate Saviour, and as willing to receive and show mercy to sinners as ever he was while he dwelt among them; and as ready to hear and answer their cries for mercy. They may now read his heart in his life, and be assured that whosoever cometh to him, and sincerely pleads for mercy, he will in no wise reject or cast out.

2. Christ's willingness to bestow mercy upon all penitent, believing suppliants, appears from his freely inviting them to come to him and receive mercy from him. He speaks to them in tender and endearing terms. "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my

yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Hear his gracious invitations to sinners in the parable of the gospel feast. "And Jesus answered, and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both *bad and good:* and the wedding was furnished with guests." Christ spake the parable of the prodigal son, to express his own and his Father's readiness to receive all penitent and returning sinners. And he has recorded it in his gospel, that he granted mercy to the penitent malefactor on the cross in his last moments, and admitted him into paradise. Indeed, Christ has expressed both by his word and conduct, as clearly as he could, his willingness to show mercy to all who sincerely plead for it.

3. Christ has given still higher evidence of his willingness to bestow mercy upon sinners, by his suffering and dying for them on the cross. This was the strongest expression of his benevolence to sinners that it was in his power to give. He came into the world to seek and to save them that are lost. He gave his soul a ransom for them; and after preparing the way for the exercise of pardoning mercy to sinners, can it be doubted whether he is willing to grant mercy to those who feel their perishing need of it, and sincerely plead for it. His tremendous sufferings on the cross speak louder than words, and carry the highest evidence that he is willing to pardon and save all penitent, believing sinners for whom he died. For if he had not been willing to bestow mercy upon them, he never would have made that atonement, which neither men nor angels could make, to remove the difficulty in the way of their salvation. He saw the difficulty, and knew that nothing, but his making atonement by his sufferings and death, could remove

it. And he suffered and died, that "grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life." No sinners can now doubt whether he is willing to bestow mercy upon them, and grant them that salvation which he has provided for them at the infinite expense of his own sufferings and death on the cross. His love and grace to sinners are written in characters of blood. I may add,

4. It is evident that Christ is willing to bestow mercy upon sinners through his own atonement, because their salvation was the reward promised to him for his performing the great work of redemption. The Father promised that a seed should serve him, and that he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. And this seed was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross, suffered the shame, and poured out his soul unto death upon it. Christ is as willing to receive penitent, believing sinners who plead for mercy, as he is to receive the reward his Father has promised him, and the glory he has engaged to give him. All the honor and glory of Christ as Mediator, require him to bestow mercy upon all who sincerely plead for it; for his pardoning mercy is the medium through which his glory and felicity will be forever promoted. Besides,

5. When sinners penitently, submissively, and believingly plead for mercy, they are then properly prepared to receive mercy; and of course there is nothing within them or without them, to forbid Christ's showing them mercy. Before they sincerely ask for mercy, they are unfit to receive pardon and salvation. And though Christ can offer them mercy before they ask for it sincerely, yet he cannot grant it before they ask sincerely. But as soon as they do ask sincerely, Christ can and will hear and answer their request. Their penitence and faith will secure eternal life. "He that believeth shall be saved."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If Christ be willing to bestow mercy upon all who sincerely plead for it, then he is willing to bestow it upon the lowest terms. We cannot conceive that any favor can be offered upon any lower terms to any person than his willingness to accept it. Did not Bartimeus receive healing and pardoning mercy at the hands of Christ upon the lowest terms? He only cried sincerely, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me." Christ made asking for favors his invariable and only condition of bestowing them. "I say unto you, Ask, and it

shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Christ always acted agreeably to this declaration, and never refused to bestow any favor upon any person who sincerely asked for it, if it were in his power to do it. All the invitations of the gospel are made upon the same low and condescending terms. Sinners are invited to buy wine and milk without money and without price, and to take of the waters of life freely. To be willing to ask for a favor, or to be willing to receive a favor, is the lowest condition upon which a favor can be bestowed. A favor cannot be bestowed upon any who reject it. Pardoning mercy cannot be bestowed upon those who reject it. But if they are only willing to ask for pardoning mercy, or even to receive it, Christ is willing to bestow it.

2. If Christ is willing to bestow pardoning mercy upon sinners on condition of their sincerely asking for it, which is the lowest condition possible, then there is no real difference between the lowest and highest terms of salvation. Though there be really but one condition of salvation proposed in the Bible, yet we find that condition expressed in a great variety of terms. In order to be saved, men are required to love God, to make them a new heart and new spirit, to repent of sin, to believe in Christ, to accept of the punishment of their sins, to deny themselves, and give up all that they have. Some of these terms are supposed to be high, and hard to be performed, and too unreasonable to be proposed. Accordingly, many preachers never propose some of these terms, and declare that they never ought to be proposed. They say it is absurd to propose to sinners to make them a new heart in order to be saved, or to give up all they have in order to be saved, or to accept of the punishment of their sins in order to be saved. They choose to preach the gospel in a more easy and agreeable manner to sinners, and tell them that Christ is willing to save them, upon the low and condescending condition of only desiring and asking for mercy. There would be no inconsistency or harm in proposing this low and agreeable condition of salvation, if they would only properly explain it, and tell how sinners should ask or plead for mercy; if they would tell them that asking sincerely implies renouncing all claims to justice, all claims to mercy, a willingness to be denied, and a cordial faith in the atonement of Christ, as the sole foundation of pardon and salvation. Such asking for mercy necessarily implies all those high and hard terms that have been mentioned. For none can

ask sincerely without loving God supremely, without making a new heart, without repenting of sin, without accepting the punishment of sin, without being willing that Christ should hear or reject their cries for mercy, nor without exercising a cordial faith in the atonement of Christ as the ground of forgiveness. The lowest comprise the highest terms of salvation. It is handling the Word of God deceitfully, to hold out the seemingly alluring terms of the gospel without explaining them. And the lowest terms cannot be explained justly and scripturally, without explaining the highest terms. Christ insisted more frequently and largely upon the highest, than upon the lowest terms of salvation. He preached much upon pure, supreme, disinterested love to God; upon a pure heart; upon true humiliation, and the highest self-denial. He did not preach inconsistently, nor unintelligibly. He did not propose different and contradictory terms of salvation, when he offered salvation upon asking; upon loving God supremely; upon the lowest humiliation; or upon the most universal self-denial. Sinners would be very willing to embrace the gospel, in order to escape future and eternal misery, if it proposed conditions of salvation which were agreeable to their selfish hearts. But they perfectly hate and oppose every condition of the gospel, when duly explained and rightly understood. They had rather die, than ask for mercy penitently, submissively, and with a willingness to be denied. They had rather die, than exercise that entire self-denial which Christ requires. They had rather die, than accept the punishment of their iniquities. They had rather die, than comply with any of these conditions of salvation. But they must die, unless they do cordially comply with all these conditions of salvation. It is therefore of infinite importance in preaching the gospel, to state and explain the conditions of salvation fully and intelligibly, though sinners cannot bear to hear them fully and intelligibly explained. There is no difficulty in preaching the gospel so as to please all classes and denominations of sinners, if the conditions of salvation are passed by, or not explained according to pure, disinterested benevolence. Unitarians can preach the gospel so as to please sinners. Arminians can preach the gospel so as to please sinners. Methodists can preach the gospel so as to please sinners. Antinomians can preach the gospel so as to please sinners. And moderate Calvinists can preach the gospel so as to please sinners. The reason is, all these preachers either overlook or misrepresent the terms of the gospel, and expose their hearers to a fatal deception. I wish I could represent all these false modes of preaching in their true and dangerous light, that they

may be understood and avoided. Let it be remembered then, that the *lowest* terms of salvation comprise the *highest;* and that they are all essentially the same, and founded in pure, disinterested benevolence.

3. If sinners must ask for mercy in the manner that has been described, in order to embrace the gospel; then one sinner is as much opposed to the gospel as another, when clearly preached. For it is never clearly and intelligibly preached, only when the terms of salvation are properly explained. Let the condition of asking for mercy be properly explained, and one sinner is as much opposed to asking as another. Let the condition of submission be properly explained, and one sinner is as much opposed to unconditional submission as another. Let the condition of self-denial be properly explained, and one sinner is as much opposed to true self-denial as another. Let any other condition of salvation be properly explained, and one sinner will be as much opposed to it as another. The stupid, the awakened, and the convinced sinner has the same selfish heart, which is totally opposed to every benevolent condition of the gospel. Accordingly we find, that both moral and immoral sinners, both awakened and convinced sinners make precisely the same objections against all the conditions of salvation proposed in the gospel. And no means or motives can reconcile them to the gospel. They all, with one consent, make excuse, and voluntarily reject the counsel of God against themselves.

4. If it be in answer to asking sincerely for mercy that Christ shows mercy to sinners, then all who ask and receive mercy have the same views and feelings respecting Christ, and the way of salvation by him. There are no different terms of salvation, for they are all essentially comprised in asking sincerely for mercy. There are not different sorts of real Christians. They have all drunk into one spirit. They all have supreme love to God. They are all united to Christ in affection. They all love the doctrine and duties of the gospel, when clearly explained. Though some Christians complain of some of the conditions of salvation, yet they virtually approve of them, in asking for mercy in a proper manner. For properly asking for mercy implies a cordial approbation of the Bible view of disinterested benevolence, total depravity, unconditional submission, divine sovereignty, personal election, and the most perfect self-denial. It is not true, that some men may be saved without disinterested benevolence, or without unconditional submission, or without true self-denial, or without accepting the punishment of their iniquities, or without renouncing all claims to justice, or to mercy, or without being willing to be

saved through sovereign grace on Christ's account. All the conditions of the gospel must be complied with in order to salvation. And these conditions are all founded in benevolence, and not in selfishness.

5. If Christ will show mercy to all who sincerely ask for it, then all sinners under the gospel must be saved, unless they refuse to ask for mercy. The terms of salvation are proposed to them. They are invited to accept the terms, and even commanded to do it; and this places them in a situation which obliges them to ask for mercy, or to refuse to ask, and perish. Those who were invited to the gospel feast were obliged to accept the invitation, or absolutely to refuse to accept it. They did refuse; and when the king heard of it, he sent his servants to destroy them. Sinners at this day are placed in the same awful dilemma. The kingdom of heaven is brought to them, and they must freely and voluntarily enter in, or be forever excluded from it. Nothing can shut them out of the kingdom of heaven, but their obstinately refusing to ask Christ for admission, while he is waiting to be gracious. But their refusing to ask will seal their destruction. For Christ commanded his ministers to proclaim in his name all over the world, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned."

6. If Christ will have mercy upon all who sincerely ask for it, then it is extremely criminal and cruel in any to try to prevent sinners from asking. It was very cruel and criminal in those who endeavored to dissuade poor, blind Bartimeus from crying to Christ for mercy. Had they prevented him from asking for mercy, he might have remained a poor wretched creature as long as he had lived, and exchanged a miserable life, for an infinitely more miserable eternity. Those who refuse to ask mercy for themselves, are generally more unwilling that others should ask for mercy, and desire and endeavor to prevent their asking. Those that mocked and sneered at the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, tried to prevent the awakening and conviction of those who cried for mercy. Simon the sorcerer tried to turn away Sergius Paulus from hearing and embracing the gospel. Sinners at this day, who refuse to ask for mercy themselves, wish to prevent others from asking, and use a vast many means to make them ashamed or afraid to ask. This is emphatically true of young people. They devise ways and means to guard themselves and others from reading the Bible, calling upon God, and hearing his Word; especially when they see any disposed to seek and cry for mercy. There are some, who make it their business to lead

others astray, who they fear will forsake them, and follow those who are more regular, more considerate, and more fearful of sinful and destructive courses. Such leaders in vice and immorality are like Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, and destroyed the souls of thousands. His conduct was extremely criminal and cruel. And the conduct of those who imitate his example, is of the same cruel and criminal nature and tendency, and may prove the everlasting ruin of themselves and others.

7. If Christ will show mercy to all who sincerely ask for it, then it is a great favor to have an opportunity to ask. It was an unspeakable favor to Bartimeus, that he had an opportunity to cry to Christ for mercy. His opportunity was singular and of short duration; but he improved it to his eternal benefit. It was indeed a great favor to the whole multitude who at that time followed Christ; but we have no account that any others besides Bartimeus appreciated and improved the favor. This, however, did not diminish the preciousness of the opportunity they enjoyed; but it did highly aggravate their guilt in neglecting and refusing to ask for mercy. Sinners are extremely apt to hope and expect that their opportunity for crying to Christ for mercy will long continue, so that they are not in the critical situation of Bartimeus while Christ was passing by, and never expected to return again. But it must be the best opportunity of crying for mercy, while he is actually near and passing by. He is now near and passing by on every side, and many are crying for mercy. He has repeatedly passed by us heretofore, and some have cried for mercy and found it. He may pass this way again; but no sinner knows that he shall live to see it. It may be the last opportunity that he will ever see and enjoy, to call upon Christ, whilst he is so near. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Christ is now saying to all who have neglected, or refused to call upon him for mercy, "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Are there not many here, who have neglected to call upon Christ for mercy? They have cast off fear and restrained prayer, and totally neglected pleading for mercy from day to day, and from year to year. Are there not some who have cried for mercy most ardently, but for a long time neglected it altogether? Is there not one, who is weary and heavy laden; and will such a one dare to refuse to cry for mercy? Sinners in this place never stood in more need of mercy than at this day, while Christ is passing by, and calling upon them to come to him. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your

hearts." It may be to some, the last call they ever will hear.

Finally, let none who have sought and found mercy at the hands of Christ, neglect to follow him. The mercy of Christ constrained the grateful Bartimeus to follow him in the way. But are there not some here who have sought and found mercy, that neglect to confess and follow their gracious Redeemer? What excuse can they have? None that will bear examination.

SERMON XXX.

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

"LET us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."—Eccl. xii. 13.

I HARDLY need to observe, that the fear of God denotes internal piety, and the keeping of the commandments of God denotes the expression of it by external obedience. This religion of heart and life is said to be the whole duty of man; or rather, as it is in the margin, the whole of man. This is a very high encomium upon religion!

I. Let us consider, in the first place, who gave such a noble recommendation of vital piety. The recommendation of religion comes with less grace, less force, and less conviction from some men than from others. Those who are preachers by office, and derive their reputation, their influence, and their support from preaching, may be supposed to recommend religion from sinister motives. Their recommendation may be deemed mere priestcraft, and unworthy much attention or regard. Ministers are thought and said to be, by some, very superstitious and ignorant men, who are unacquainted with the ways of the world, and the great and grand things which afford the highest satisfaction to men of cultivated minds and elevated stations in life. Though clergymen may be sincere and well-meaning men, yet they have low and contracted views of the world and the things of the world, which leads them to imagine that piety and devotion are the highest sources of human happiness. Their recommendation of religion, therefore, must weigh very light in the minds of those who know more of the world, possess more of the world, and derive more happiness from it. Let us inquire, then, who recommends religion so highly in the text. If we now turn to the first chapter of this book, he will tell us who he was. "I the preacher was king over Israel in

Jerusalem." Upon this preacher we may make a few remarks.

He was not a preacher by office. He did not belong to the tribe of Levi. He was never consecrated to the priest's office, nor clothed in pontifical or sacerdotal robes. He was no minister of the sanctuary, and received no compensation for any sacerdotal services. He was not a clergyman, but a mere layman, and had no personal interest to serve by promoting or recommending religion. His recommendation of it, therefore, ought to be considered as sincere, impartial, and entirely disinterested.

There is no reason to think, that he was ever given to religious enthusiasm, superstition, or bigotry. He was a king's son, received a princely education, was early initiated in all the customs and manners of a palace, and associated with the richest and greatest men in the kingdom. It is difficult to conceive how such a man in such a situation could be enthusiastic, or superstitious, or bigoted in religion. He was no visionary or superstitious preacher, and therefore recommended religion from a full conviction of its truths and importance.

He was a man of superior learning, wisdom, and sagacity. The inspired writer of his life tells us, that "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. His wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men." He had more wisdom, knowledge, and learning, than all the priests, philosophers, and moralists among the surrounding nations, who had lost the knowledge of the true religion, and fallen into the grossest errors and delusions. He was able to distinguish the true doctrines of divine Revelation from all their false and absurd sentiments respecting God, virtue, and piety. There is no ground to suspect that he founded his religious opinions on the ignorance, tradition, or delusions of the heathen. He knew the origin not only of the true religion, but every false religion then prevalent. He declared from his own knowledge, that to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man. Besides, he made this declaration after he had become immensely rich, and attained to the highest degree of worldly splendor and magnificence. The weight of gold that came to him in one year, was six hundred three score and six talents, which amounted to above four millions and a half sterling. At the same time, he reigned not only over Judah and Israel who were numerous as the sand by the sea; but over all the kingdoms, from the river, unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt. If we now turn to

the second chapter of Ecclesiastes, he will tell us how he employed all his power, wealth, and honor to his own self-gratification. "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards; and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy." Now none can suppose, that Solomon, in all his glory, recommended religion as the highest source of human happiness, because he was ignorant of the world, and all the happiness the world can afford to those who possess the largest share of it. He was fully capable of weighing the worth of the world, and the worth of religion in the balance of the sanctuary, and determining the comparative weight and worth of each. The conclusion which this royal preacher formed in favor of the supreme worth and importance of religion, is worthy of universal attention and belief. Let us next inquire,

II. How it came to pass, that the king of Israel formed such a favorable opinion of a devout and religious life, which was so different from the general opinion of mankind. He tells us, that after he had seriously, critically, and extensively examined the nature and tendency of the most brilliant and flattering objects of the world, he found they were totally insufficient to satisfy the large desires of a rational and immortal mind. After he had made the experiment himself, he drew up a conclusion of the whole matter, and wished to publish it for the instruction and benefit of all future generations, that to fear God and keep his commandments was the whole duty of man. If the world could have made any man completely satisfied, without religion, it seems as if it might have made Solomon so. But he solemnly declares, that he actually found it to be, not a source of happiness, but of unhappiness. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem. In much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase. This is also vanity." Thus Solomon found by his own unhappy experience, that the world could not afford him pure and permanent happiness,

which led him to conclude, that nothing short of vital piety can make a rational and immortal soul supremely and forever happy. Let us consider,

III. The truth of Solomon's conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

The filial fear of God and cordial obedience to his commands, comprise the whole of true religion, and true religion constitutes the whole duty, worth, and importance of man, or as it is in the original, "the whole of man." This Solomon pronounces to be true from his own experience, after all that he had seen, and known, and possessed of the world. Let us now inquire whether he formed a wise and just conclusion upon this interesting subject. And we must all be convinced, that his conclusion is well founded, if we consider,

1. That righteousness or true holiness forms the supreme glory and moral excellence of man. Holiness constitutes the highest glory and moral excellence of every intelligent being in the universe. God is love. His glory and moral excellence consist in pure, holy love, which spreads a moral beauty and glory over all his natural attributes of power, knowledge, wisdom, and sovereignty. Were not these natural perfections under the influence of his pure and perfect goodness, he would not be the most amiable and glorious, but the most formidable and most odious being in the universe. It is holiness alone, which adorns the character of Gabriel, and renders him superior in worth and moral excellence to Lucifer, the meanest and most contemptible of all the creatures of God. It was holiness, which stamped the moral image of God upon Adam, and made him but a little lower than the angels in his moral worth, dignity, and importance. Though God endued him with rational and immortal powers, and made him capable of perpetual advances in the knowledge of the divine character, perfections, and purposes; yet as soon as he lost his holiness, he lost all his moral glory and excellence, and became the vilest creature on earth. Though his posterity are endued with noble intellectual powers, which they are capable of perpetually cultivating and improving; yet they are vile and worthless creatures so long as they remain totally depraved and entirely destitute of every holy and virtuous affection. But righteousness, or true holiness adorns all their intellectual powers, restores the moral image of God, and raises them to the primitive glory and excellence of man. But as soon as they become holy as God is holy, they become perfect as God is perfect. True religion is the highest glory and ornament of the human character, and renders man

worthy of the love and approbation of God, and of all his rational creatures. . Solomon never appeared more glorious, nor commanded higher veneration and respect, than when he poured out his heart in fervent prayer at the dedication of the temple. Job was more beloved, venerated, and admired for his piety, than for all his power and wealth. All men are of the same opinion, in respect to what they believe to be true religion or vital piety. They all inwardly acknowledge, that it constitutes the highest dignity, worth, and importance of man. The godly esteem the godly the excellent of the earth, and even the ungodly inwardly bow before the godly. Any man, whether he be rich or poor, high or low, who appears to fear God and keep his commandments, rises higher in the real estimation of the world, than any ungodly, unprincipled man can rise. Solomon's opinion of piety approves itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2. Religion renders men the most useful, as well as the most amiable and excellent. God made mankind for his own glory, and designed to employ them as instruments of promoting it. For his pleasure they are and were created. Accordingly, he has given them a rational and immortal existence, and endued them with all those corporeal and intellectual powers and abilities, by which they are capable of answering the end of their creation. All these noble powers and faculties are so many talents, which they can employ either for, or against their Creator and Benefactor. So long as they continue in the state of nature under the influence of their depraved hearts, they either bury their talents like the slothful servant, or employ them in their own service, instead of the service of God. Absalom was a man of great beauty and brilliancy. He was endued with talents of the highest order, which he might have employed in the service of his father, of his Maker, and of his country, but his ambitious spirit prompted him to employ all his superior powers against his father, his God, and his country, and to ruin himself for time and eternity. This is the disposition of all men, who are destitute of the fear and love of God. They go out of the way, become unprofitable to God, and useless and worse than useless to themselves, and to the world. But true religion or vital piety disposes men to employ all their noble powers and faculties to answer the great and important purposes for which they are given. Supreme love to God never fails to lead men to consecrate themselves and all that they have to the glory of God. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," and produces universal obedience to the divine commands. Though Paul had basely abused his noble talents, and become a worth-

less wretch; yet as soon as the love of God was shed abroad in his heart, his first inquiry was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" When God told him what to do, he devoted himself entirely to his service, and obeyed his most self-denying commands. He put his life in his hand, preached the gospel in the face of a frowning world, and became one of the most useful and most faithful servants that God ever had on earth. Though Manasseh had been a prodigy of wickedness; yet as soon as he received the grace of God in truth, he became his humble servant, a zealous reformer, and a man of extensive usefulness as long as he lived. But whether men become religious in childhood, youth, or riper years, vital piety has the same salutary effect. It both qualifies and disposes men to give their hearts and lives to God. Look over the long catalogue of the most useful men from the beginning to the end of the Bible, and you will find that they all feared God and kept his commandments, and exhibited bright and amiable traits of vital piety. Who made the ark and saved a sinking world? A man of piety and perfect in his generation. Who led Israel out of Egypt to the land of promise? Moses, Caleb, and Joshua, men who loved, feared, and obeyed God. Who conquered the enemies of Israel? A man after God's own heart. Who built the temple? A man whose pious and enlarged heart sanctified all his superior talents, and directed them to the glory of God. Who carried the gospel almost round the world? A man who loved his Saviour and the souls of men so well, that he was willing to risk all his mortal and immortal interests for the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners. What inspired Luther and Calvin with fortitude and zeal to meet all difficulties and dangers in reforming the Christian Church? Was it not a sincere and ardent love to God and divine truth? Was it not a supreme love to God and regard for his glory, that warmed the hearts of our forefathers with a steady, persevering zeal to plant the gospel in this land, and lay a foundation for all the civil and religious privileges which we so amply enjoy? Men of piety in all ages have acted the most important parts on the stage of life, and done most good in the world. It is the nature and tendency of true religion to prepare men for the most extensive usefulness, which is the great and noble end, for which God has given them their rational and immortal existence. It must be further observed,

3. That pure religion which consists in true holiness, lays a foundation for the purest and most permanent happiness that men can possibly enjoy. It cannot be denied, that the world affords many things, which highly gratify the selfish and sin-

ful desires of mankind, which may be called a species of happiness. While Solomon made great works, built great houses, planted great vineyards, laid up great treasures, and enjoyed great power, he says he rejoiced. But his joy was not satisfactory, nor permanent. He found upon reflection, it would not bear a comparison with the happiness he had enjoyed in the love and service of God. It is "the chief end of man to glorify God and enjoy him forever." To love God and enjoy union and communion with him, is the only source of the purest and highest happiness to rational and immortal beings. It is from this source that the pure spirits in heaven derive their pure, perfect, and permanent felicity. And it is from this source alone, that men who are rational and immortal spirits, can derive that intellectual, spiritual, pure, permanent happiness, which they need in this life and in the life to come. To fear, love, serve, and enjoy God is both the whole duty, and the whole happiness of man. This appears not only from the nature of man and the character of God; but from all that is said upon this subject through the Bible. Solomon says, the ways of wisdom "are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." He never was so happy, as when he descended from his throne, fell upon his knees, and poured out his heart before God at the dedication of the temple. David found his highest satisfaction in nearness to and communion with God. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forever more." "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness." "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is: to see thy power and thy glory, as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand." "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Such preference David gave to the enjoyment of God to all the happiness that the world could afford. Jeremiah found his highest happiness in the enjoyment of God. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." The prophet Habakkuk found a source of happiness in God when all other sources

failed. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Christ taught that holiness is the only source of true and lasting happiness. He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." He said to the woman at Jacob's well, "Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." All the promises of future and eternal felicity, are made to those who fear God and keep his commandments, and take him for their supreme portion. It is promised, "that all things work together for good to them that love God." This promise Paul believed would be fulfilled. "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The same apostle assures Christians, that all things are theirs. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." These and many other promises of future and eternal blessedness are made to all who love God and the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Thus it appears, that there is both a natural and constituted connection between holiness and happiness, and that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Solomon's conclusion of the whole matter is confirmed by reason, Scripture, and the experience of all good men. It is unquestionably true, that "to fear God, and keep his commandments," is not only the whole duty, but emphatically the whole of man, as it comprises all his moral excellence, all his worth and importance, and all his happiness for time and eternity.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said, that it is not beneath any person in the world to be truly and experimentally religious.

Religion has generally been more neglected by the high than by the low; by the rich, than by the poor; by those of a superior, than by those of inferior talents. This can be accounted for upon no just or rational principle. For it appears from reason, scripture, and experience, that it is the nature and tendency of vital piety to give beauty, worth, and importance to every human character in every station, relation, connection, and situation in life. Solomon possessed superior talents, superior wisdom, superior wealth, superior magnificence, and reigned over the most renowned nation then in the world. All the surrounding nations paid homage to his supremacy and dignity. But he did not think it beneath him to fear God and keep his commandments, and seriously perform the duties of piety and devotion. The first thing he did after he had put the crown on his head, and taken the reins of government into his hand at his father's decease, was to repair, with all the congregation of Israel, to the tabernacle in Gibeon, and there offer a thousand burnt-offerings upon it. In that night did God appear unto him, and said unto him, "Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast showed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead. Now, O Lord, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people that is so great? And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honor, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king; wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall any after thee have the like." Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple was pleasing to God; but this was doubtless much more pleasing to him, for it discovered a greater sense of his own weakness, submission, dependence, and confidence in the divine aid and assistance. But be this as it may, it clearly manifested that he feared God, and meant to keep his commandments, and resolved to lead a life of pure religion and vital piety. The religion which he lived, he has recommended to all men in all future ages. Who now can think it beneath him to be religious? If Solomon had no reason to be ashamed of fearing God, of reading his word, of calling upon his name, or of keeping his commandments,

who has any reason to be ashamed of living a holy and devout life? Has a young man or an old man, a rich man or a poor man, a politician or a philosopher, or any other person, any reason to call in question the decision of Solomon respecting the duty and importance of religion? Is there a single sinner here, who believes that he can justify his neglect of religion before the bar of Solomon? But if no sinner can justify himself at the bar of Solomon, how can he justify himself at the bar of God, who will "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil?"

2. If religion adorns and dignifies every human character, then none who are truly religious have any reason to be afraid or ashamed to profess it before the world. All who cordially embrace the gospel, and love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, ought to profess his religion before men. They ought to do this, in order to attend the sacred ordinances appointed for their comfort and edification, and to exhibit the beauty, reality, and importance of vital piety. But those who fear God, are often afraid or ashamed to keep all his commandments. They neglect the important duty of professing Christ before the world. It was so disreputable in Christ's day for any to follow him, and openly acknowledge their attachment to him and to his cause, that some, who thought they embraced the gospel, were afraid or ashamed to profess his religion. John tells us that "among the chief rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." But Christ was displeased at such conduct, and declared, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of his holy angels." Are our wise men wiser than Solomon? Are our rich men richer than Solomon? Are our great men greater than Solomon? If they are not, why should they deem it a greater degradation in them, than it was in Solomon, to have and profess religion? He considered it his whole duty and highest dignity to love and obey God, and to bind himself in the most public and solemn manner to keep his commandments. Abraham, the richest and greatest man in his day, did not think it beneath him to enter into covenant to walk before God, and be perfect in obedience to him, and in faithfulness to his family, commanding his children and household to keep the way of the Lord. Joshua, the commander-in-chief of all the armies of Israel, did not think it beneath him to resolve and declare, that "as for me and my house, we will serve the

Lord." After David had spent a day on a very public, solemn, and joyful occasion, "he returned to bless his household," and discharge the indispensable duty of family religion. The queen of Sheba admired the sitting of Solomon's servants, and the religious order of his whole family. But, alas, how are the times and opinions of men changed! Do not governors, magistrates, and those in lower grades of office, deem it beneath them to profess and practice religion? Can they reconcile it to the revealed will of God, or to their own consciences, that they think it beneath them to do what is the whole duty, the whole excellence, and the whole happiness of man? It is a signal mark of folly to neglect, despise, and reproach religion; and Solomon has reminded those who are guilty of this folly, what will be the consequence of it: "Shame shall be the portion of fools." The higher men rise in wealth, power, and influence, if they despise and neglect to profess and practice vital piety, the lower they will eventually sink in guilt, in shame, and in everlasting contempt. God declares in the most unqualified manner, "Them that honor me, I will honor; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

3. If religion be the only source of pure and permanent happiness; then those who are destitute of it, are to be pitied, rather than to be envied. Men have often formed a very false and foolish opinion of the prosperity of the wicked. They have often thought, and sometimes said, that God treats his enemies better than his friends, because he gives them the largest portion of worldly honor, power, and affluence. Even good men are too apt to run into this egregious error. It seems, that Job in his troubles was guilty of it. He asks, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us: for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" These were his murmuring thoughts, but he was convinced of his folly, when he reflected, "that the wicked are reserved to the day of destruction; they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath." David admonishes men against indulging vain, false, foolish thoughts respecting the delusive appearance of the wicked. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they

shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." But though he saw and condemned this folly in others; yet he afterwards acknowledges that he fell into it himself. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, they speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. They say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction." Job and David were not the only men, nor the only good men, that have envied the prosperity of the wicked, and complained of God for his apparent partiality towards them. Thousands in every age have been guilty of the same hard thoughts of God, and of the same false, foolish, and painful feelings towards the unsatisfactory and destructive prosperity of the wicked. Solomon drew up a more just conclusion concerning the present enjoyments and future prospects of the ungodly. He pronounced them all "vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit;" and laid it down as an everlasting truth, that to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man, and the whole source of pure, perfect, and everlasting happiness. Good men have abundant reason to be satisfied and possess their souls in peace, when they reflect, that God has given them his special grace, and made them heirs to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for them in heaven.

4. It appears from the nature and tendency of religion, that a religious life is the happiest life that men can live in this world. It is the most reasonable life. To fear God and keep

his commandments is a reasonable service, just such a service as God may justly require of men, whom he has made capable of knowing, loving, and serving him. It is the most useful life they can live. It is living for God, and laying up durable riches and righteousness, and preparing themselves for a future and better state, which is unspeakably more useful, than to lay up treasures on earth where moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal. A religious life carries its own reward with it. "A good man is satisfied from himself." He lives in the fear and love of God. He casts his cares and burdens on his arm. He tastes his goodness in all the blessings he enjoys. He reflects on the past with pleasure, and anticipates the future with hope. He runs in the ways of God's commandments with delight, and finds great satisfaction in the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity he has his conversation in the world. Though he may meet with many troubles and afflictions, yet he believes all these things will work together for his good, which gives him that peace which the world cannot give, nor take away. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth, even forever." "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." This appears not only from the nature and tendency of religion, but from the fair and full experience of some of the greatest and best of men that have ever lived in the world. They have told us, that they found their highest happiness in living a holy, devout, religious life. Is not the testimony of Enoch, of Abraham, of Moses, of Joshua, of Solomon, of Job and Daniel, worthy of entire credit, in respect to the superior gain of godliness? Were any men more competent to determine whether a religious, or irreligious life is the most happy? Can the testimony of Hume, Voltaire, and the whole host of Infidels, refute or invalidate the united testimony of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles in favor of religion, as the highest source of pure and permanent happiness, in this life and in the life to come? Be ye then "followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Hence,

5. It is very unwise, as well as sinful, and dangerous for any to *neglect* any longer, to fear God and keep his commandments. It is the reigning folly of the day, to pursue lying vanities that cannot profit, and to neglect the one thing needful. Atheists and Infidels cannot be said to neglect religion; they deny it and despise it. But there are multitudes, who

neglect to fear God and keep his commandments at present, who soberly intend to become pious before they leave the world and go into eternity. They are striving to rise higher in wealth, in reputation, and worldly peace and prosperity, before they renounce those dear objects, and live holy and devoted lives, in which they can now see no good. But if it be the nature and tendency of religion to produce pure and permanent happiness, and if the wisest and best men have found a religious life to be the only happy life; then it must be very unwise to postpone religion and neglect to fear God and keep his commandments. Solomon found by experience, "that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." It is extreme folly to live in disobedience to God, to reason, and to conscience. "The way of transgressors is hard." They can enjoy no solid peace so long as their hearts are at variance with the dictates of their understanding and all their rational powers. Their selfish and inconsistent desires and pursuits create a continual conflict between their hearts, the dictates of reason, and the reproaches of conscience. "They are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Sin and misery are inseparably connected. A rational and immortal creature, who acts contrary to his rational powers and eternal interests, sins against his own soul and destroys himself. Hence divine wisdom says, "All they that hate me, love death." The longer men live in the love of the world and the things of the world, the more they become the servants of sin and the enemies of righteousness. The neglect of religion glues their hearts to the world, sears their consciences, tightens the cords of iniquity, which bind them over to destruction. It is the grossest folly in them to wait for a more convenient season to become religious and happy. Hear then the expostulations of wisdom. "Wisdom crieth without: she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the openings of the gates, in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you. Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand: and in her left hand riches and honor. [redacted] are ways of pleasantness, and all

her paths are peace." The earlier any become religious, the earlier they become safe, and happy, and useful. As soon as they find the treasure hid in the field, and the pearl of great price, they become rich indeed. By renouncing the world as the source of happiness, they renounce nothing but sin, and vanity, and vexation of spirit; but by fearing, loving, and serving God, and taking him for their portion, they secure a source of pure, perfect, and everlasting happiness. This is agreeable to the language of Solomon, and of one who was greater than Solomon. "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Finally, this subject exhibits a bright and glorious prospect to those who fear God and keep his commandments, and act agreeably to the dignity of their nature and the chief end of their existence. They were formed to know, to love, to serve, and to enjoy God, and they shall know, and love, and serve, and enjoy God to all eternity, which is the whole duty, the chief end, and supreme felicity of man. They are continually growing in knowledge and in grace, and approaching nearer and nearer to the perfection of their nature, to the perfection of angels, and to the perfection of Him, who is God over all, blessed forevermore. But how gloomy is the prospect of them who know not, fear not, love not, and enjoy not God. They are at present, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They belittle, degrade, and wrong their own souls. They are vile, unprofitable, and worthless creatures. They are what Christ calls the chaff and the tares, which he will throw away or destroy as that which is worthless and vile. If you should live many days, and rejoice in them all, yet remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. Hear, then, once more, the conclusion of the whole matter. "Fear God and keep his commandment; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

SERMON XXXI.

ENERGY OF MIND ESSENTIAL TO USEFULNESS.

"I will not go in."—Nehemiah, vi, 11.

Nehemiah was one of the most amiable and useful men in his day. He finished a great and arduous work, which Ezra and Zerubbabel left unfinished. Zerubbabel conducted the first company of the captive Jews to Jerusalem, and rebuilt the temple. Ezra conducted the second company of the Jews to Jerusalem, and in a measure re-established the public worship of God in the temple. But the city of Jerusalem still lay in ruins, and the people were exposed to the incursions and ravages of their surrounding enemies. As soon as Nehemiah received intelligence of the deplorable state of Jerusalem and of the people there, "he sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." He then made application to the king of Babylon for leave to go and repair the city of his fathers' sepulchres. God, who had the king's heart in his hand, disposed him to grant his request. Having obtained this liberty, he set out, under the king's protection and with letters of recommendation in his hand, and safely arrived at Jerusalem, where he abode three days, before he made his business known to either the rulers, or the priests, or the people. In this interval, he surveyed the desolate and ruined state of the city, and formed his resolution to repair the walls and restore it to its strength and beauty. But in effecting this great design, he met with violent and artful opposition. His enemies used all the means in their power to intimidate him and his people, and cause them to relinquish their work. But Nehemiah had so much courage and resolution, that he disregarded the threats of his enemies and the advice of his timid friends. For when Shemaiah advised him

to conceal himself in the temple, he boldly replied, "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? *I will not go in.*" This noble reply teaches us,

That energy of mind is necessary in order to do good in the world. It is proposed to show,

I. Wherein energy of mind consists.

II. How it may be acquired. And

III. Why it is necessary in order to do good in the world.

I. Let us consider wherein energy of mind consists. This chiefly consists in confidence, resolution, and courage.

1. Energy of mind partly consists in confidence of one's judgment. A man's judgment is that opinion which he forms in consequence of arranging and comparing his ideas upon any subject that gains his attention. If any sentiment is proposed, we are capable of arranging and comparing our ideas upon it, and forming a judgment, whether it be true or false. If any particular mode of conduct be proposed, we are capable of arranging and comparing our ideas upon it, and of forming a judgment, whether it be right or wrong, wise or unwise, and whether it be best or not best to act in the manner proposed. We are all more or less capable of deliberating upon any question or subject, and of forming an opinion about it; and we generally do form an opinion. Some, indeed, are much more deliberate and accurate in forming their judgment than others, which lays a foundation for some to have a much greater confidence in their own judgment than others. Those who are the most deliberate, and take the most care to form their opinions, are commonly the most apt to rely, and have the most reason to rely upon their own judgment; and will, of course, act with the most energy. This every one knows to be true by his own experience, whether he be more or less judicious. We always act with the most energy, when we have the most confidence in our own judgment. This appears from observation as well as experience. We find those persons firm, stable, and energetic in their conduct, who appear to place the most confidence in their own judgment, whether their opinions are formed with or without the aid of others. In many cases, it is the part of a wise man to take advice, but when he obtains it, he improves it merely as advice, and does not rely upon it without examination. It is immaterial from what source a man obtains information, if he does but obtain it. But no information can be had, without being und[illegible]. One man's telling another what is wise or best, affo[illegible] information, unless he sees why it is wise or [illegible] he sees why the

advice is good, then he gains real information, and is prepared to act with confidence in his own enlightened judgment. For every man will act with energy, when he firmly believes that he has formed a correct judgment in respect to his object of pursuit. Nehemiah had full confidence in his own judgment in regard to the great object which he was pursuing, and would not relinquish it for the advice of friends or the terror of his foes.

2. Energy of mind partly consists in a man's resolution to execute his own designs. There may be a head to plan, when there is no heart to execute. How many men form good designs, which they have not resolution to effect? They clearly see their designs to be wise, and know they would answer valuable purposes if executed, and they see no peculiar difficulty or danger in pursuing them; but through mere irresolution and negligence, never carry them into effect. Such men have no energy, and never accomplish any great and important purposes. But those who possess real resolution, have a readiness and promptitude to accomplish their purposes without delay. Nehemiah had such a resolution. As soon as he had formed his design to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city, and had sought for divine direction, and gained the king's permission, he immediately pursued his purpose. Paul no sooner embraced the gospel and determined to preach it, than he began the arduous work, without consulting flesh and blood. He did not suffer his pious design to languish by delay, or want of resolution. We never find any men to be energetic, who are slow and dilatory in executing their designs. But we always find energy in those who have firmness of resolution and promptitude in pursuing their designs. This was exemplified in Napoleon, who gained more victories, by his resolution and promptitude in acting, than by any other means. Resolution is an essential quality of mental energy.

3. Energy of mind comprises courage as well as resolution and confidence. Courage is a disposition to meet whatever dangers, difficulties, or opposition may lie in the way of prosecuting any great and arduous undertaking. Courage is a little different from fortitude, which is a disposition to suffer natural evil. Many persons have fortitude, who are destitute of courage. They can bear evils when they come, but cannot bear to look forward to them without fear. This is the case of the natives in this country. They can support the greatest pains and tortures without sinking under them, but they have no courage to meet danger, or to face enemies. They are very timid and fearful of evils before they come, but when they

come they can sustain them with astonishing firmness and fortitude. But energy has respect to acting, rather than suffering, and therefore requires courage. Men must have courage to meet and encounter opposition, and to conquer everything that is hostile to the great and benevolent designs they are pursuing. Nehemiah had this courage. For he said, "Should such a man as I flee?" I will risk my life before I will go into the temple to conceal myself, or relinquish my great and good work. David had courage to defy the threats and meet the face and arm of Goliath. Paul had courage to go up to Jerusalem notwithstanding the advice of his friends and all the dangers that stared him in the face. Though he knew that bonds and imprisonment awaited him in doing good, yet he had courage to meet every danger to which his duty might expose him. Such courage to encounter all opposition and to meet all dangers and sufferings in prosecuting great and benevolent designs, is one quality which is necessary to constitute energy of mind or decision of character. I now proceéd,

II. To show how this energy of mind or decision of character may be acquired. I know, indeed, that a foundation for it must be laid in nature, and that all men are not equally capable of acquiring it to the same degree. Some men are born with stronger nerves and stronger intellects than others, which form a capacity for greater energy of mind. The mind and body mutually strengthen or weaken each other. The same man has not the same energy at one time as at another. Julius Cæsar, who had superior energy of mind, lost it in sickness, with which one of his enemies reproached him. But though mental energy may be partly owing to nature, yet it may be greatly cultivated and improved, and of course, there are proper means to be used in order to acquire it; and among others the following may be employed.

1. Men should endeavor to have a clear and comprehensive view of every object they pursue. By this they will avoid discouragement from any new and unexpected difficulties, which are connected with their design, and might have been foreseen and expected. Too many form hasty designs before they have thoroughly viewed them in all their relations, connections, and consequences, and this naturally subjects them to doubts and delays, and often to a final defeat and disappointment. Many modes of conduct appear, at first view, very differently from what they do, after a full investigation. Men often see many things which are desirable to be done if they could be done, but find by a proper examination that they are utterly impracticable. Such objects of pursuit ought never to be attempted,

because those who attempt them will certainly be disappointed. But when men have a clear and full view of what they purpose to do, they will rarely meet with any unexpected difficulties, to weaken their ardor and energy. The exercise of wisdom and sagacity in forming designs, directly tends to create ardor and energy in executing them. Those who undertake any good and great design after due consideration and investigation generally succeed, though they meet with opposition and formidable difficulties. If men wish to act with energy in their public or private concerns, let them form and digest their own plans with wisdom, and they will be in no danger of losing their ardor and energy in executing them, or of failing of success.

2. In order to acquire energy of mind, men must learn to reason in a correct and conclusive manner. All men have occasion to reason upon the concerns in which they engage, and especially in matters of great magnitude and importance. But many are apt to be satisfied with plausible, instead of conclusive arguments, in favor or against what is proposed to be done. Men may reason plausibly against any truth, or against any design however wise or benevolent it may be; but they cannot reason conclusively against either. Therefore they should never content themselves with mere plausible arguments, whether suggested by themselves or others; but aim to get conclusive arguments in favor of what they adopt, and against what they reject. And as they gain a habit of reasoning conclusively, they will place a dependence upon their conclusions, which will prompt them to act with energy, and without hesitation or delay. Those who are in the habit of reasoning conclusively, form their judgment readily, and are prepared to act decidedly and energetically; while those who neglect to reason, place but little dependence on their own opinions and resolutions, and act not with promptitude and decision; and generally choose to hear and rely on the opinion of others. Such men can have no energy or decision of character.

3. Men may acquire energy of mind, by placing themselves under a necessity of acting. So long as they feel themselves under no necessity of forming and executing any noble and important designs, they feel no occasion of acquiring energy of mind. And the great majority of mankind choose to keep themselves in a neutral state, and devolve the business of forming and executing useful and important designs upon others. They choose to promote their own private good, and totally disregard the good of the public. They have no disposition to form any great design, or to undertake any great work, which

will require peculiar resolution, courage, and zeal to accomplish, and which will lay them under a necessity of acquiring more than common energy. Such careless, indolent persons may be sometimes obstinate, but never energetic. They throw themselves into the hands of others, and wait to be moved before they move, and to be directed before they act. And when they do act, they act with no more energy than that which moves them to action. But those who desire to serve God and do all the good they can in the world, are willing to devise and promote great and noble designs, which will lay them under a necessity of exerting all their mental powers and activity. All men are naturally indolent and averse to corporeal and mental exertions. This appears from the conduct of all nations in the rude and uncultivated state of nature. All their rational powers and faculties are in a low and torpid state. They indulge sloth and inactivity as much as possible, and consequently they are entirely destitute of mental energy. In order to acquire energy, therefore, men must feel that they have an important part to act on the stage of life, and resolve to meet and surmount everything that may obstruct their course, and not pass through the world as mere cyphers. By surmounting one difficulty after another, their resolution, zeal and energy will continually increase, till no difficulties or dangers will deter them from the most arduous and self-denying duties.

4. Another way to acquire strength and energy of mind, is to keep noble and worthy objects in view and pursuit. Small, trifling, and mere personal objects of pursuit belittle and weaken the mind; but noble and benevolent objects of public utility, serve to enlarge and invigorate the mind, and create an ardor and energy in prosecuting any laudable purpose. Every man's mind expands and strengthens the more his views expand, and his designs become more extensive, complicated, and important. This was the case with Nehemiah. His design of rebuilding the grandest city in the world was truly noble, benevolent, important, and complicated. It was of sufficient magnitude and difficulty to call into vigorous exercise all his latent powers and faculties, and to create the most active energy. The great and noble designs which Moses, David, Solomon, and Zerubbabel pursued, inspired them with peculiar energy, which bore down all opposition, surmounted all obstacles, and crowned their efforts with final success. If men would only propose and pursue great and good designs, they would soon find resolution and energy to execute. No man knows how much good he can do in the world, until he makes attempts to do good; for he cannot know the powers and fac-

ulties he possesses till he tries them by repeated mental exertions. How many men have lived years in obscurity without knowing and discovering their superior powers, until their own circumstances, or some important event constrained them to exert their talents and ability in doing great and noble actions? By keeping great and good objects in view and pursuit, men will certainly acquire a growing strength and energy of mind. I must add,

5. A consciousness of rectitude of intention never fails to inspire men with energy in discharging every private and public duty. It was this that inspired Nehemiah with extraordinary zeal and energy in pursuing the great and good work which he had conscientiously undertaken, notwithstanding all the embarrassments in which he was involved by the malignity and intrigues of the enemies of Zion. His consciousness of his good intentions inspired him with courage and zeal in promoting the cause of God and his people, which overcame all opposition. He carried his life in his hand, and determined to sacrifice it rather than fail of success. If men would acquire energy and zeal in doing good, let them pursue no other than good designs from good motives. Let integrity and wisdom guide them in all their purposes, and they need not despair of sufficient energy to carry them into effect. While they are conscious of the goodness of their designs and the purity of their motives in carrying them on, they will feel that confidence in their own judgment, that zeal in their own hearts, and that courage to meet and surmount all difficulties, which constitute the essence of energy and decision of character. It now remains to show,

III. Why such energy as has been described is necessary in order to do good in the world. No man was made for himself alone, but for the good of his fellow-men. It is the duty of all to employ the talents God has given them to promote his glory and the good of mankind. But in order to exert these to the best advantage, they must have a good portion of real energy.

1. Because it is to be expected, that wise and benevolent designs will be opposed with energy. The greatest and best purposes have been the most vigorously opposed. The design of Moses in delivering the Israelites from the power and oppression of Pharaoh was obstinately opposed; and so was the design of rebuilding Jerusalem, that had been laid waste. Sanballat, Tobias, and others, conspired against Nehemiah, and used all their art and influence to defeat his design. The preaching of the gospel has everywhere been opposed by the enemies of truth. Designs of less importance have met with

similar treatment. None can do much good in a public or private station without exciting opposition, which will require firmness and energy of conduct.

2. Energy is necessary in order to turn all difficulties and opposition to advantage in pursuing great and good designs. Energy enables men to surmount difficulties; and difficulties surmounted serve to increase energy. After men have avoided one danger, or surmounted one difficulty, they feel a new resolution and courage to avoid another danger, or to surmount another difficulty. We often see this verified in bold, enterprising men, who have been familiar with public affairs, and difficult undertakings. They generally become more and more bold, resolute, and energetic in effecting their supreme and ultimate designs. Nehemiah grew stronger by all the opposition he overcame, and all the schemes of his enemies which he defeated. He turned disadvantages into advantages. Besides,

3. The mere want of energy disqualifies men for every duty of life. All duties are connected with difficulties from within and from without. It is difficult to overcome the depravity of the heart, which must be overcome in every duty. It is difficult to overcome the great adversary, who hates and opposes all zeal and activity in duty, but he must be resisted in every duty. It is difficult to overcome the things, the men, and the spirit of the world, but these things must be overcome in the discharge of duty. But without energy, no man in any profession or business of life can do his duty. Destitute of this, the farmer, the mechanic, the physician, the advocate, the judge, the magistrate, and the preacher, will each of them fail in his attempts. Men may have the best natural and acquired talents, but without energy they will either bury or abuse them, and disqualify themselves for every private as well as public station. Since the apostasy, the performance of duty is attended with an effort, which nothing but energy can overcome. This is an indolent world in respect to duty, though not in respect to activity. The great majority of mankind stand every day, every month, and every year idle in God's view. They perform not a single duty. They have no resolution to act for God, or for one another, but only for themselves, and for themselves in this world only. They have no resolution even to ask for mercy. It is, therefore, of infinite importance that every man should have energy sufficient to meet and overcome all impediments to duty, whether they arise from his heart, from the world, or from the enemy of all righteousness.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If energy of mind has been properly described, then it is something very different from obstinacy. Energy leads to activity, but obstinacy to inactivity or negligence. Energy arises from knowledge, but obstinacy from ignorance or voluntary blindness. Those who are obstinate shut their eyes against the light, and refuse to see the truth when clearly exhibited. Pharaoh was obstinate in shutting his eyes against the miracles of Moses, and in shutting his ears against the divine messages which he delivered to him. Energy leads men to believe and act reasonably; but obstinacy leads men to believe and act contrary to reason. Energy is increased and strengthened by knowledge; but obstinacy is increased and strengthened by ignorance. Energy is an excellence; but obstinacy is a defect and blemish in any human character. But men are extremely prone to take one of these qualities of the mind for the other. They often call energy obstinacy, and obstinacy energy, in one another. Those who are firm, courageous, and persevering in a good cause, are called by those who oppose it, obstinate. The holy zeal and energy of Nehemiah, in refusing to hide himself in the temple, was considered as obstinacy. Paul was thought to be obstinate, when he boldly resolved to go up to Jerusalem at the risk of his life, contrary to the advice of his friends. The pious zeal and energy of Luther and Calvin, in preaching the gospel in defiance of the threats of the enemies of truth, was supposed to be obstinacy. Those, on the other hand, who are bold and zealous in the cause of error and wickedness, are often applauded for what is called noble resolution and energy. But men are more apt to mistake obstinacy for energy in themselves than in others. Paul took his obstinacy for noble energy, in zealously opposing the gospel, and persecuting Christians. And thousands at this day imagine they display great energy and magnanimity in opposing the gospel and the cause of religion in every form. This, however, is a very great mistake. The scriptures no where approve or inculcate obstinacy; but they do approve and inculcate a holy zeal and energy. Moses, just before his death, exhorted Joshua and the people of Israel to exercise a holy zeal and energy in taking possession of Canaan, and opposing all false religion they should find in it. "Be strong," said he, "and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them; for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee, he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." And Joshua, before he left the world, gave a similar exhortation to courage

and magnanimity. "Be ye, therefore, very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom, to the right hand or to the left." God commanded the prophets, and Christ commanded his ministers and followers, not to fear the enemies of the truth while doing their duty. Paul said, "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." And he exhorted the Corinthians to "be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." A holy confidence, courage, energy, and magnanimity in a good cause, is a rare and noble trait in any human character, and a perfect contrast to obstinacy and perseverance in doing evil and opposing truth. It highly concerns every one to distinguish holy energy from unholy obstinacy in himself and others. This mistake is both common and dangerous among both good men and bad, for it prompts thousands to do evil, under an apprehension that they are doing good. Obstinacy, in a thousand cases, appears so much like true energy and magnanimity, that it is mistaken for it, and highly applauded.

2. It appears from this subject, that none but real Christians can have true energy and decision of character. All who are destitute of true holiness are destitute of the peculiar qualities that constitute an energetic and decided character. They are destitute of that confidence in themselves, of that firm resolution, and undaunted courage, which are essential to genuine energy of mind. There is no uniformity or permanence in selfishness, for it will always vary as apparent interest varies. This all, who are under the dominion of a totally selfish heart, know to be true in respect to themselves, and cannot place entire confidence in the rectitude of their intentions and pursuits. Though they may be satisfied that they form good designs, and intend to pursue them; yet they are not confident they are acting from right motives, which creates a sensible timidity and irresolution in prosecuting their purposes. This is always the case in respect to those who know they form and pursue bad designs. Sanballat, and Tobias, and others, who attempted to intimidate and turn Nehemiah from his noble and benevolent purpose, were afraid of him, but he was not afraid of them. For he was conscious that he was engaged in a good undertaking from good motives; but they were conscious that they were engaged in a bad cause from bad motives. They had no confidence in their own selfish designs and motives, but Nehemiah had full confidence in his benevolent designs and motives. He possessed an energy which they did not and could not possess. But allowing that those who are destitute of righteousness

or true holiness may form really good designs, and resolve to pursue them; yet they are conscious of their selfish motives, which creates a diffidence in themselves that is totally inconsistent with true energy and decision of character. All sinners love their own interest so well, that they will not give it up for the sake of promoting any other interest in the universe. But good men love God so much, that they will give up their own interest for the sake of promoting his glory and the great interests of his kingdom. They have that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, and no opposition which they find in the path of duty, can intimidate or destroy. The perfectly benevolent Saviour had an unconquerable energy. Though he was the Lamb of God, yet he was the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and all who possess his spirit, possess a portion of his energy. The blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church. They conquered when they died. The little flock of Christ have maintained his cause in defiance of the power, the authority, the learning, and the wealth of a frowning and malignant world. This can be accounted for on no other supposition, than that pure, disinterested benevolence is the most active and powerful principle in nature, and is the only source of the highest energy and magnanimity in all created and uncreated beings. Every Christian has the spirit of a martyr, and though he may be sometimes timid, yet he may be sometimes bold. Peter was sometimes timid, yet he was often bold and formidable to the enemies of truth. He possessed an energy which no sinner can possess. And this is true of all that are grounded and settled in the truth. They have always, when called to the test, displayed an energy and decision of character which has astonished the world.

3. If true energy and decision of character may be acquired, then all are to blame who do not acquire it. It is something of very easy attainment, and lies within the power of every individual to possess. It is not a natural, but moral excellence and acquisition. It is level to all persons of every age, character, condition, or capacity. It is not founded in strength of body or mind, but in purity and benevolence of heart. Not only the rich, but the poor man; not only the learned, but the unlearned man, may acquire that resolution, confidence, and courage which constitute the noblest energy and magnanimity. Esther, Deborah, and the mother of Moses, the mother of Samuel, and the mother of Obed, displayed as signal resolution, energy, and decision of character, as the excellent worthies whose characters and conduct are recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. None have a right to consider the want

of energy as a mere calamity for which they are not to blame. It flows from moral depravity, and, like every other effect which flows from that source, is criminal and inexcusable. God requires all to exercise energy, as well as patience, and submission, and self-denial, in the discharge of duty. None can run the Christian race, without Christian courage and energy. They are required to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint, and to be valiant for the truth. They are required to overcome the world, to fight the good fight of faith; to put on the whole armor of God, and to wrestle against principalities, and powers, and rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places. It is sinful to be destitute of energy, and to complain for the want of it. Every person must have energy and decision of character, in order to do his duty, and live in safety in this present evil world.

4. If energy of mind has such a happy tendency as we have heard, to prepare men for doing good, then we may learn why some men do so much more good than others. The fact cannot be disputed, that some, and comparatively few men, have done the most good, that ever has been done in the world. Who built the ark? Who led the people of God out of Egypt into Canaan? Who conquered that country? Who built the temple? Who rebuilt the temple and repaired the walls of Jerusalem? Who first carried the gospel round the world? Who reformed the Christian Church from popery and idolatry? Who planted our nation? Who have defended it? Who have formed, maintained, enlarged, and established our churches? If we consult sacred and profane history, we shall find that a few bold, pious, energetic, enterprising men have been the principal instruments of bringing about these great, important, desirable, and interesting events. And they have done these things, not so much by their superior talents, learning, wealth, or power, as by their signal resolution, courage, energy of mind, and weight and decision of character. Other men have had as good talents, as good learning, as much property, and power as they had, but never had that virtuous and benevolent energy, to devise, undertake, and carry into execution schemes of great and extensive public good. Without energy, men always bury or abuse their talents, and all their power of doing good. If you look round the world, you cannot fail of seeing the great majority of mankind standing all the day idle, and cumbering the ground. They sink down in torpid indolence, and become mere cyphers in the world.

5. Hence we see why there are so many useless men. It is not owing to their want of either natural or acquired talents,

nor to the want of opportunities of doing good. Every man has some useful talents, which he might employ in doing good to himself and others. Almost every man has peculiar talents which qualify him for some peculiar useful business of a private or public nature. Some have corporeal talents, which fit them to cultivate the earth. Some have a mechanical genius, which capacitates them for inventing curious and useful things. Some have superior natural and acquired talents to make literary improvements, and to fill some literary, or civil, or ecclesiastical offices. All men whether learned or unlearned, or whether possessed of superior or inferior abilities, might usefully serve God and their generation, and make the world the better for them. But the mere want of resolution, courage, and energy of mind, renders multitudes useless and worse than useless, and even a nuisance to the world. They have no heart to employ their talents to any useful purposes; which leads them to spend their time and strength in the pursuit of low, mean, trifling, unworthy objects, or to sink down into torpid ease and indolence. All such poor, worthless, wretched creatures might be of immense advantage to themselves and to the world, if they would call their latent powers into action, and propose and pursue designs of public, or private utility. The want of virtuous, benevolent energy of mind, will account for all the indolence, folly, and vice in the world. There is indeed a spurious energy, which springs from selfishness, and prompts some evil men to exert all their superior powers in devising and pursuing deeds of mischief. There have been, from age to age, some men wise to do evil, but to do good they have had no knowledge. They have possessed great talents, and strong minds, but weak hearts. They have had no courage, resolution, or energy to deny themselves, and surmount the difficulties and dangers they saw in doing good; and therefore resolved to take the more easy and safe course of doing great things to gratify their selfish, ambitious hearts. Nimrod, Absalom, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and thousands of such men have been the troublers of the world, by exercising a selfish, instead of a benevolent energy and magnanimity. Such a spurious energy of mind destroys the best natural talents, by turning wisdom into folly, and strength into weakness. Such an energy renders men more unwise, weak, and contemptible, than if they had no heart, courage, or resolution to employ their superior talents to any rational and useful purpose. This conduct is more inconsistent, absurd, and criminal, than if they impotently sunk down into torpid ease and indolence. So that the want of a noble and

benevolent *energy* of mind is the primary cause, why there are so many useless and worse than useless men in the world.

6. It appears from what has been said, that it is absurd to esteem men more for their talents, than for the good use they make of them. This is a great and prevailing error among mankind. Great talents draw the attention, respect, and esteem of the world to those who possess them, whether they employ them to a good purpose, or to a bad purpose, or to no rational purpose at all. There is no moral virtue or excellence in mere talents, and no man deserves to be esteemed for his mere capacity of doing good, but only for employing all the power he possesses to valuable purposes. But mankind in general have always applauded men for their superior abilities, whether they have employed them in doing good, or in doing evil. Lord Byron has been, is now, and probably will be for a long time, celebrated and applauded for his great and brilliant talents, though he prostituted them to the meanest and vilest purposes. There is a littleness and meanness in doing little mischief and great mischief, and especially by great men. Those ought to be esteemed for their talents, who employ them properly; and those ought to be despised and contemned for their talents, who bury, abuse, or pervert them. How many esteem themselves, and think they ought to be esteemed by the world, for their mere capacity of doing that good, which they never do. David says, "Men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself." Selfishness is approved and applauded by a selfish world. Let any man acquire great knowledge, great wealth, great power, and great influence, by the most selfish and dishonest means, and he will be praised and respected for doing well to himself. But ought men to be praised for employing all their talents in pursuing selfish, and not benevolent purposes? Let La Fayette be respected and esteemed for his talents and heroism in doing good; but let traitors be despised and contemned for abusing and perverting their talents.

7. It appears from what has been said, that good men have great encouragement to persevere in their religious course, and to surmount all difficulties which may lie in the way of their duty. They have the approbation of their own minds, that they are engaged in a good cause; they have the approbation of God; and they will finally have the love and approbation of all holy beings in the universe. Everything calls upon them to be strong and of a good courage. Opposition calls for the exercise of holy energy, and a decision of character—desertion urges them to increasing vigor and activity—and success ought to animate them in the discharge of every duty.

8. It appears from what has been said, that sinners have no encouragement to pursue their present course. You have hitherto lost your time, abused your talents, and met with nothing but disappointment.—It is time to act as rational and accountable creatures, and answer the great end of your being, which is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. If you act in this manner, you may meet opposition, but you may overcome it. You may meet with desertion from those you never expected would leave you; but this should quicken and rouse your energy. You may meet with success, and this may animate you. You have nothing to lose by exercising supreme love to God and man; but you have everything to lose by fighting against God. Be zealous, and repent, and reform; and strengthen the things that are ready to die.—You may be idle, but you cannot be neutral. You may have a false and selfish energy, but it will languish and die. Turn from sin to righteousness, and this will give a courage and resolution that nothing can resist. Take courage to go to God, and commit yourselves into his hand. This must be done, or you must perish.

SERMON XXXII.

MORAL POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD.

"Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces."—Jer. xxiii. 29.

UNDER the Old Testament dispensation, God employed prophets to reveal his will to his people. The true prophets were divinely inspired, and delivered the truths which he suggested in the very words which he dictated. So that all they taught the people was the pure word of God, without the least mixture of human ignorance, error, or falsehood. But there were false prophets as well as true, who pretended to divine inspiration, of which they were entirely destitute; and who pretended to deliver the word of God, while they taught nothing but their own inventions and delusions. Though the people were fond of the false prophets, yet God severely reproved them, and appealed to the people themselves, whether they found the words of the false prophets to be as weighty and powerful as the words of the true prophets, who faithfully delivered the divine messages to them. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: what is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." It follows, "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces?" As the rocks, which are some of the hardest substances in nature, cannot resist the force of fire and a hammer, so God says there is nothing which can make so deep impression upon the minds of men as his word. Accordingly, it will be my object to show, that the word of God is calculated to make the deepest impression upon every human mind. Here it may be observed,

1. That the inspired writers represent the word of God as calculated to make the deepest impression upon the minds of men. David says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting

the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." The apostle says, "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Again he says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds: casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." These are strong representations of the power and energy of divine truth to affect and impress every human heart.

2. It is the design of the word of God to impress the minds of men. God took this method of instructing mankind, on purpose to make the deepest impressions on their minds. He knew that his works and providence would be disregarded; and therefore he determined to speak to men in a more plain and pungent manner. As he perfectly knew the views, the feelings, and the conduct of all classes of men; so he was able to dictate such words as should lay open their hearts, describe their characters, and exhibit the dreadful consequences of impenitence and unbelief in the most impressive manner. And we appeal to all who have ever seriously read the scriptures, whether they have ever found such weighty, solemn, interesting truths as they have found in the Bible; or such as have made so deep impressions on their minds. This leads me to observe,

3. That the word of God has produced the deepest impressions upon the minds of men wherever it has been heard or read. When the law was delivered at mount Sinai, it produced a surprising effect upon the minds of three millions of people. They not only trembled at the view of the divine appearance, but inwardly yielded to the force of divine truth. They solemnly declared, "All that the Lord our God hath said, we will do, and be obedient." When the book of the Law was found in the temple, in the reign of Josiah, and was read before him, it struck him with astonishment. And when he caused it to be read in public, it made a deep impression on every mind, and produced a general reformation. When Ezra read the word of God in public, it carried conviction to the hearts and consciences of multitudes, and brought them to genuine repentance. When Baruch read the word of the Lord by Jeremiah to Jehoiakim, it was more than he could bear. It awakened all the enmity of his heart, and led him to the most presumptuous act. He took his penknife, and cut the roll, page after

page, and threw it into the fire. After Christ's ascension, the word of God produced astonishing effects. It awakened the consciences and subdued the stubborn hearts of thousands. When Stephen preached his last sermon, the word of God which he delivered was sharper than a two-edged sword. For we are told, that those who heard it were cut to the heart, and gnashed with their teeth. After the apostles carried the gospel among distant and stupid nations, the word of God was mighty to the pulling down of strong holds, and demolishing the usurped kingdom of Satan. Though civil power, religious superstition, and all the learning and philosophy of the world, unitedly opposed the gospel; yet the doctrines of divine revelation triumphed over all these combined obstacles, and bowed the hearts of men to the sceptre of the crucified Saviour. Human learning and wisdom had long been tried in vain, to reform the lives and subdue the hearts of men. No human means could bring the nations of the earth to the knowledge of their Creator, and of their own characters and condition. But when the gospel was carried among them, it overthrew the heathen temples, false religion, and vain philosophy; and brought high and low, small and great, the learned and unlearned, to the knowledge and worship of the only living and true God. And though the world were soon alarmed, and united all their power and malice to counteract the force of divine truth; and raised ten severe persecutions against the preachers and professors of Christianity; yet the word of God gradually overturned Paganism through the whole Roman empire, and established the kingdom of Christ where Satan's seat was. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. This was such a signal display of the power and efficacy of the gospel, as the most learned infidels have never been able to account for, on the supposition that the word of God is a cunningly devised fable. Nor has the word of God lost its irresistible power to impress the minds of the most hardened and obstinate sinners. And this will more fully appear, if we consider,

4. The *nature* of the great truths contained in the word of God. They are of all truths the most important and interesting to mankind. Any truth is impressive in proportion to its nature, magnitude, and importance. Truths respecting divine and eternal objects are infinitely more weighty, than truths respecting time and the things of time; and calculated to make a far deeper impression on the minds of men. The truths contained in the Bible respect the greatest beings and greatest objects in the universe, and consequently are the greatest and most important truths, that God himself could reveal to man-

kind, for the purpose of enlightening and impressing their minds. Here I would observe,

1. The word of God reveals the truth respecting his great and amiable character. Pagans and infidels have acknowledged the existence of an eternal Being; but they have not acknowledged all his natural and moral perfections. Some heathen and infidels have supposed that God is eternal and comprises all things, and is not distinct from all things, but all things are a part of his existence. And those of this opinion, deny that God is the Creator and Governor of the world. Others have supposed, that though God has made the world, yet that he does not concern himself in the government of it, but sits an idle spectator of the creatures, the scenes, and objects that exist on the earth. But such an eternal Being may be as unimportant as any creature or object he has made. Though the light of nature might have discovered to the heathen the character as well as the being of God; yet they never did discover his true character, but have sunk down in inexcusable ignorance and darkness. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." But in the word of God, his character is clearly revealed. There he is represented as the Creator, Preserver, and Disposer of all things; and as constantly carrying on his wise and holy designs in the course of his universal providence over all his creatures and all his works. Those who have been led to believe the existence of the Deity, by the mere light of nature, have always been disposed to form a low, mean, inconsistent, and absurd idea of his natural and moral character. But the inspired writers represent the natural and moral character of the supreme Sovereign of the universe in the most amiable, glorious, and formidable light. Isaiah represents God as measuring the waters in the hollow of his hand, as meting out heaven with a span, and comprehending the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighing the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance; as sitting upon the circle of the earth, as viewing the inhabitants thereof as grasshoppers, and as bringing princes to nothing, and making judges vanity. This plain truth concerning the supremely glorious and awfully sublime character of the only living and ever-living God, is infinitely weighty, and can never enter any created mind, without making a powerful and deep impression on it. It is like as a fire, and like a hammer, to break the hardest and most adamantine heart in pieces.

2. The word of God reveals the divine purposes, as well as

delineates the divine character. These are adapted to affect the interests, and consequently the hearts of all intelligent creatures. They never can be realized without exciting a deep sensibility. The truth respecting the being and even the perfections of God, makes a less impression on the minds of men, than his decrees. These set all the attributes of the Deity in the most interesting attitude, in respect to all his dependent, and especially his sinful creatures. They immutably fix their future and eternal destiny. They are highly pleasing to all the friends of God, but infinitely terrible and alarming to all his incorrigible enemies. For if he has decreed one thing, he has decreed all things. If has appointed things temporal, he has appointed things eternal. If he has fixed the state of one world, he has fixed the state of all worlds. If he has elected one man, he has reprobated another. If he has determined that one thing shall promote his own glory, he has determined that all things shall promote his own glory. In a word, if he has decreed all things, then all things are under his absolute control. And this plain and important truth is fully revealed in his word, which gives it peculiar force and energy. Men cannot understand the doctrine of divine decrees, without being sensibly affected. This truth always finds the heart, and excites either love or hatred to God. For it carries in it life or death, heaven or hell, to every one who feels its weight. It is a fire in the breast of every sinner, and a hammer to break his purposes, and demolish his hopes of heaven.

3. The word of God teaches his universal and irresistible influence over all his creatures, which is extremely interesting to them. The scripture represents all men as being in the hand of God, as the clay is in the hand of the potter. It represents God as working in the hearts of all men, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. This truth runs through the Bible, and gives energy to everything said in it. For if men were independent of God, they would be little concerned about his being, his perfections, and his purposes. But if he have a constant and absolute control over all their views, determinations and actions, then it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps, nor of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. This truth throws all men equally into the hands of God, which is extremely disagreeable to a corrupt heart. There is no truth, which can be found in any other book, so interesting and weighty, as the doctrine of the divine agency. And it never is clearly exhibited and understood, without making a deep and powerful impression.

4. The Bible contains the divine commands. These are ex-

ceeding broad, and reach the inmost recesses of the human heart. They are not like human laws, which regard only the overt act, but require truth in the inward parts, and forbid every selfish and sinful affection. When our Saviour preached the law in its true meaning, extent, and spirituality, it pierced and impressed the minds of all who heard it. They acknowledged that he spake as one having authority. That law, which requires all men to love the Lord their God with all their hearts, and condemns them to everlasting destruction for the least failure of obedience, is infinitely binding and weighty, and sufficient to render every impenitent sinner speechless and confounded. "For what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Paul and a thousand other sinners have found this effect from the law. He says, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." The law is clothed with all the authority of God, and has all the weight of an infinite Being, to impress the mind of a rational, sinful, and dependent creature.

5. The word of God contains the terms of salvation. These cannot be found in any other book on the face of the earth. They cannot be found in the book of nature, or the book of providence; they cannot be found in any heathen writers; they are to be found in the word of God alone. And it is highly interesting to creatures placed in a state of probation, and preparing for a future and eternal state, to know the only grounds of acceptance with God. The terms of salvation are expressed in a great variety of ways in the word of God; but they are comprised in one short, plain, comprehensive sentence. "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned." Nothing short of a cordial approbation of the gospel scheme of salvation, can entitle any person to pardoning mercy. No external performances, no desires, prayers, seekings, or strivings can be of any avail, without that faith which worketh by love.

6. The word of God describes the character and condition of mankind, by nature. These important points, which it is indispensably necessary for them to know, cannot be known without the Bible. After all the most wise and learned heathen have said concerning the immortality of the soul, it would still remain doubtful, were it not for the declarations of *Him*, who formed the spirit of man within him. He has told us, that though the body may be killed, yét the soul cannot be destroyed. Christ established the truth of the future and immortal

existence of the soul. This renders the nature of men infinitely more important, than they are naturally willing to believe. How much ingenuity and learning have been employed, and are still employed to prove the mortality of the soul? Mortal deists are numerous and increasing, who profess to believe, that the soul dies with the body. But the word of God demolishes all their sophistical and fine-spun reasoning; and assures them that they must exist, and be spectators of the divine character and conduct forever. Besides, the Bible fully describes the characters of men. This is the only book in which the total corruption of the human heart is clearly laid open; and it is a clear discovery of this truth, which destroys all their supposed good works, and places them upon a level with the spirits in prison, in point of criminality and ill-desert. Nor can they resist the force and pungency of Christ's pointed address: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Though sinners wish to feel safe and happy; yet when they go into the sanctuary, it cuts them to the heart to hear, that their feet stand in slippery places, and their end is to be burned. They cannot help trembling, when they hear the tremendous curses of the divine law denounced against them.

7. The word of God unfolds the invisible scenes of the invisible world. If the light of nature could give us full evidence of a future state; it could not open to our view the eternal world, and discover the scenes which lie beyond the grave. But the gospel has brought life and immortality to light; and described the state of the blessed and of the damned. The glory and blessedness of heaven are represented in the most beautiful and glowing language; and the regions of misery are described as gloomy and terrible in the highest degree. These descriptions of a future and eternal state which God has given us in his word, are designed and calculated to make deep and solemn impressions upon every rational and thinking mind; and cannot be read, or heard, without joyful, or painful emotions of heart. I may add,

8. The word of God reveals a future resurrection, and general judgment, which are scenes of the highest concern to all intelligent creatures. They will all be not only spectators of them, but deeply and eternally interested in them. When this world shall be burnt up; when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of God, and come to judgment; then angels, men, and devils, will be placed before the supreme Judge of all the earth, and all hearts will be made manifest, for the great purpose of rewarding and punishing all according

to their works. The righteous will be received into the kingdom of glory; and the wicked doomed to the kingdom of everlasting darkness and despair. And he who has the keys of heaven and hell, will shut both, never to be opened again. This will finish the works of creation, providence, and redemption; and fix all created beings in a state never to be changed. Such are the great and important truths which are contained in the word of God, and in that only. For no other being but God was able to reveal them. And now they are revealed, they have the most direct and powerful tendency to penetrate and solemnize the minds of all the intelligent creation, and will sooner or later produce this effect. The word of God has carried conviction to some of the most stupid and hardened sinners, wherever it has been plainly and properly preached. While Paul reasoned of temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come, even Felix trembled. And while other ministers have preached the word of God with plainness and pungency, they have often carried conviction to the hearts and consciences of sinners, and thrown them into the deepest anguish and distress of mind. The word of God is still like a fire and a hammer, and capable of breaking the most rocky and adamantine heart in pieces.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the word of God be suited and designed to make deep impressions upon the minds of men; then all gospel sinners have had real convictions of their guilt, their danger, and duty. The word of God always answers the end whereunto he sends it; and he always sends it to produce conviction in the minds of those who hear it. When the gospel is plainly and solemnly preached, it seldom fails of exciting attention; and if it excites attention, it will excite convictions. Sinners cannot hear and understand the great truths of the gospel, without feeling their weight and importance, and receiving those impressions in which genuine convictions consist. How many who followed Christ from a vain curiosity, could not hear him preach, without feeling the force of the great truths which he taught and inculcated? How often were they constrained to say, "Never man spake like this man;" for he spake as one having authority? How many who came to hear Peter preach on the day of Pentecost, went away convinced and confounded though not converted? Felix, who expected to be highly gratified with the preaching of Paul, his prisoner, could not hear

him, powerfully reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and of judgment to come, without a trembling conviction of his guilt and danger. Such effects Christ predicted would be produced by the word of the gospel wherever preached. In the parable of the sower, he represents divine truth as deeply affecting not only the good ground, but the stony ground and thorny ground hearers. In the most stupid times, the word of God operates as a fire and hammer upon the most secure and thoughtless. Though they come to the house of God with full confidence of being able to resist the force and energy of divine truth; yet in spite of their hearts, the truth often finds its way to their conscience, and gives them powerful conviction of their guilty and perishing condition. And though they very soon stifle such transient conviction; yet the same conviction is repeated and increased from Sabbath to Sabbath. And all these convictions are accumulating guilt, and will, sooner or later, rush upon them with overwhelming and irresistible force, and throw them into the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. The fire which the word of God so often kindles in their breasts, will ere long burst into a flame, that cannot be quenched, but burn to all eternity. It is not a trifling matter to sit under the preaching of the gospel; it will draw after it consequences of most serious and solemn importance. Hence,

2. If the word of God does actually make deep impressions upon the minds of sinners; then they can never eradicate these impressions from their minds. They are made by truth, and truth is permanently and immutably the same. The impressions made by the world and the things of the world; by vain imaginations and false reasonings, may be and will be eradicated by the force of divine truth; but truth and the impressions made by it, will last forever. Sinners will eventually find, that they have been under strong delusions respecting the vanities of the world, and the hopes and expectations they have placed upon them, and the impressions they have received from them. But when these false impressions vanish, the impressions of divine truth will revive in their full and most powerful and painful force. The convictions, which the word of God has impressed upon their minds, will continue as long as they remain his sinful creatures, and as long as they retain their memory, their understanding, and their conscience. What they have once been convinced is true respecting God, they will always be convinced is true. What they have once been convinced is true respecting their guilt and ill-desert, they will always be convinced is true. And what they have once been convinced is true respecting a future and eternal state, they will always be

convinced is true. For though they may at times forget that God exists; yet he will always exist; though they may at times forget that they are sinful and guilty creatures; yet so long as they continue impenitent, they will continue to be sinful and guilty creatures; and though they may at times banish future and eternal realities from their view; yet those realities, and their inseparable connection with them will always exist. Their convictions of these divine truths, are an essential part of their rational and moral existence, and can never be separated from it. They must get rid of themselves, before they can get rid of the convictions of divine truth, which the word of God has lodged in their minds. Though they may strive to stifle their convictions, by neglecting to read and hear the word, and by giving their whole attention to the pursuits and amusements of the world; yet the divine truths, which they have heard, understood, and felt, will continue to bind and condemn them forever, unless they become cordially reconciled to them. Now consider this, ye that forget God, and what he has said to you in his word, and what impressions his word has already made upon your hearts and consciences, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

3. If the word of God is calculated and designed to make the deepest impressions upon the minds of men; then there is nothing which ministers can preach, which is calculated to impress the minds of their hearers so deeply, sensibly, and profitably, as the plain and important truths of the gospel. They may, indeed, preach many things more pleasing to the ears and hearts of men, than the pure word of God; but those things will be as light as chaff in comparison to the weighty truths, which God has revealed in his word, and commanded them to preach. God severely reproved the false prophets for doing this. "I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: what is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophet, saith the Lord, that use their

tongues, and say, *He saith.* Behold I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." Are there not false teachers, at this day, who preach as false doctrines as the false prophets did? Do they not preach their own dreams and delusions, while they profess to preach the pure word of God? But what is this chaff to the wheat? is it as heavy as the wheat, and as nourishing to those who love the truth? No religious error ever carried the same conviction to the conscience, as the opposite truth. God appeals to hearers, to distinguish those who feed them with chaff, from those who feed them with wheat. There are many light preachers, as well as erroneous ones, who neither use the words, nor express the sense, of scripture, in their sermons. And do these preachers make the same deep impression upon the minds of their hearers, as those do, who preach the word of God faithfully? Hearers are capable of forming the best judgment of preaching; and if they would judge according to the dictates of their reason and conscience, rather than according to their fancy, they would seldom judge amiss. They are able to distinguish truth from error, whether they prefer truth to error, or not. Our Saviour's hearers were able to distinguish his preaching from that of the scribes and pharisees. They felt that he preached as one having authority.

4. If the word of God is like a fire and hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, then sinners have a heart harder than a rock. Though the word of God is suited and designed to make deep impressions on the hearts of sinners, yet it is not powerful and weighty enough to break their hearts. The best of sinners do always resist the Holy Ghost, and refuse to submit to the word of God, which demonstrates that their hearts are harder than a rock. Many imagine, that sinners are not so stubborn and stout-hearted as the scripture represents them to be, and that if they can only be made to understand the word of God, they will not resist, but cordially embrace its doctrines. And sinners generally have the same good opinion of themselves. But how is this consistent with plain stubborn facts? Neither the works of God, nor the providence of God, nor the *word* of God, have ever been sufficiently powerful to break their hard and stony hearts. God asks, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." And speaking of their obduracy he says, "Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people." This God said after he had tried the force of his word

for more than three thousand years, and had found it totally incapable of breaking the stony hearts of sinners. He seems to be at a loss what to do with them after their hard and impenetrable hearts had resisted the most powerful means he could use to bring them to submission and obedience. It could never have been known in this world, that the hearts of sinners were totally depraved and harder than a rock, if they had not universally opposed and resisted the word of God, which exhibits the most solemn, the most interesting, and the most weighty and powerful truths, that God himself could exhibit before their understandings and consciences. It is only in the view of, and in opposition to, divine truth, that awakened and convinced sinners become really alarmed at the hardness and obstinacy of their depraved hearts.

5. If the word of God is suited and designed to make deep impressions on the minds of men, then it is not in vain to preach the gospel in the most stupid times. For though it will not break hard and stony hearts, yet it generally makes some impressions upon them, and often deep impressions, which may answer important, if not salutary ends. Accordingly, God requires ministers to preach, whether men will hear or forbear. For he means to try them by his word, and prepare them to be converted, or given up to judicial blindness and condemnation. Though in a time of general stupidity, men make light of preaching, and imagine it does little good or hurt, yet preaching does not make light of them, but produces impressions, which are, and will be felt to be heavy, insupportably heavy and important. The preaching of the word of God will in all cases, and in respect to all persons, answer the very purposes which *he* means to answer by it, and become a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death. The word of God is equally adapted to *change* or *harden* the hearts of men, and infallibly does produce the one or other of these effects, whether they are sensible of it or not. This both speakers and hearers ought to realize; and if they did realize, they would be ready to tremble, to speak and to hear the word of eternal life, or eternal destruction.

6. If the word of God is suited to make deep, important, and everlasting impressions upon the minds of men, then *delaying* sinners act a most unwise and criminal part in despising, opposing, and resisting the influence of divine truth. They despise the word of God, when they neglect to read it, and when they neglect to hear it. They oppose the word of God, when they employ all their ingenuity and knowledge in reasoning against it. And they reject the word of God, when

they read it, hear it, understand it, but refuse to embrace it. In some or all these ways, every sinner exerts himself to evade and resist the force of divine truth, and by fighting against God, fights against himself. This is extreme folly as well as extreme guilt. So God himself tells them: "All they that hate me love death." "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he has no heart to it?"—"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?" Though sinners are guilty of ten thousand sins, yet the sum and substance of their guilt consists in their despising, opposing, and rejecting the everlasting truths of the gospel; and of this sin the best as well as the worst, the most sober and amiable, as well as the most vain and profligate sinners are really guilty in the sight of God, who looketh on the heart.

7. If the word of God has a powerful tendency to impress the minds of men; then they have the best opportunity of determining their spiritual state, while they are hearing his word preached. They have, indeed, an opportunity of determining this interesting point, while they are seriously and attentively reading his word. But when they read his word, they are apt to read it in favor of themselves, and construe it according to their own hearts, which are extremely deceitful. The case is very different, when they hear the word explained and inculcated according to its genuine meaning and importance, without fear or favor of any man. And let me ask, my readers, what is your experience upon this subject, and what have been your feelings and opinions of yourselves, under the clear exhibitions of the word of God on his day, and in his house? Have you loved or hated it? You can all answer this question—and must answer it.

SERMON XXXIII.

IMPORTANCE OF EXHIBITING THE TRUE CHARACTER OF SINNERS.

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"—Matt. xxiii. 33.

Christ was the most benevolent person that ever appeared on earth. He went about doing good, expressing his benevolence to men of every character and condition. He rejoiced with them that rejoiced, he mourned with them that mourned; and he wept with them that wept. He fed the hungry, he healed the sick; he removed the disorders of the eye, of the ear, and of the understanding; he raised the dead from the grave; and wherever he went, he preached the gospel to the poor and perishing. He never gave an unnecessary pain to a single individual of mankind. But yet he said many things which were extremely displeasing to those who heard him preach and converse. This displeasure increased to such a degree, that they attempted to stone him, to push him from a precipice, and to take away his life. All this he foresaw and foretold. Why then did he lay open the hearts of sinners so fully and plainly? No other reason can be assigned, but the importance of doing it. He saw the importance of telling them how they appeared in his heart-searching eye, notwithstanding all their external beauty and excellence. He freely allowed that they paid tithe of mint, of anise, and cummin; that they made clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; that they appeared beautiful without; that they built the tombs of the prophets, and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous; and that they thought, if they had lived in the days of their fathers, they would not have been partakers with them of the blood of the prophets. Nevertheless, he addresses these outwardly fair and amiable persons in the plain and pointed language of the text,

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Would the kind and benevolent Redeemer have represented the character of sinners in this odious light merely to displease them? Would he have disclosed their real, inward feelings, had it not been a matter of great necessity and importance? And could he, who knew all things, be under any misapprehension of what was, in this case, really necessary and important? If such was the knowledge and benevolence of Him who came to seek and save them that are lost, then we may safely draw this conclusion from the language of the text:

That it is important to exhibit the character of sinners in a clear and intelligible light. I shall,

I. Endeavor to set their character in a clear and intelligible light; and,

II. Show the importance of doing it.

I. I am to set the character of sinners in a clear and intelligible light. Here I shall take Christ for my guide, who perfectly knew what was in man. I begin with observing,

1. That sinners are absolutely destitute of pure love or true holiness. Man was originally created in the moral image of his Maker, which consisted in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. But that image was lost to all the posterity of Adam by his first offence. They are now by nature entirely destitute of the moral image of God, or of that pure, holy love which Adam originally possessed, and which forms the moral beauty and excellence of his Creator. "God is love." All his moral character consists in pure, disinterested, universal love. His goodness, his justice, and his mercy are branches of his holy love or benevolence. Of this holy, virtuous love sinners are wholly destitute. Christ expressly said to them, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you." He knew them better than they knew themselves. Though they thought they loved God, and were his dutiful children; yet he knew that they were totally destitute of every holy and benevolent affection. We are therefore authorized by Christ himself to say to all who are in the state of nature, that they have not the least degree of that love to God or man which the divine law requires, and in which the moral image of God consists.

2. All sinners are under the entire dominion of an unholy and depraved heart. Though they are destitute of holy affections, they are not destitute of all affections. They love and hate with all their hearts; but all their love and hatred are entirely selfish. There are but two kinds of moral exercises in the universe. These are benevolent and selfish affections. God is possessed of benevolent affections; but Satan, his first and

greatest enemy, possesses only selfish affections. And the same kind of selfish affections fills the hearts of all the enemies of God. All unrenewed sinners are under the entire influence of that self-love, which leads them to desire and seek to promote their own interest supremely. They are, as the apostle says, "lovers of their own selves." And Christ told his hearers that there was no virtue or goodness in any of their internal exercises or external conduct, while they acted from entirely selfish and sinful motives. "If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again." Christ here represents sinners as altogether selfish. And on another occasion he more plainly told them so. "Jesus answered them, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." Whatever sinners say, or do, or desire, they are always governed by a selfish heart, which is full of evil. They love no person nor object, only as that person or object appears disposed or suited to promote their own good; and they hate no person or object, only as that person or object appears to be disposed or suited to oppose their own private interest or happiness. As they are totally destitute of pure, disinterested benevolence, so they are always actuated by mere selfishness, in all their views, and feelings, and conduct. This leads me to observe,

3. That their selfishness is perfectly malignant in its nature and tendency. Selfishness is in its very nature, diametrically opposite to benevolence. A selfish desire is always opposed to a benevolent desire. A selfish man is always opposed to a benevolent man. Solomon says, "An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked." Those who are under the sole influence of selfishness, and who desire and seek their own good solely, must be opposed to every person and object, that stands in the way of their selfish desires and designs. It is the dictate of reason, that the selfishness of sinners must be, in its nature and tendency, perfectly malignant. And this was the repeated declaration of Christ upon the subject. He calls the best of sinners, by appellations which denote the highest degree of malignity. "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers." He addressed the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were persons of the same character, in the same language. "O generation of vipers!

how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh?" Other inspired writers give the same representation of the selfish heart. When John the Baptist saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" The apostle Paul says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." This enmity he ascribes to the native depravity of both Jews and Gentiles, that is, to the native depravity of all mankind. "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Such is the malignant nature and tendency of that total selfishness, which reigns in every sinner's heart. We find a similar description of the malignant nature and tendency of selfishness in the third chapter of the second epistle to Timothy. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." The nature and tendency of selfishness is to produce all these malignant effects. The most malignant feelings and conduct naturally flow from selfishness. This has been the primary source of all the sin and wickedness that has ever been committed in any part of the universe. It was selfishness that prompted Satan to rebel against God in heaven, and to spread sin and misery through the world. It was selfishness that moved Cain to kill Abel, Judas to betray Christ, and the Jews to crucify the Lord of glory. Selfishness has produced all the wars, and fightings, and persecutions, in which millions of the human race have imbrued their hands in each other's blood. In a word, selfishness has made all men, by nature, serpents and a generation of vipers. Neither serpents, nor vipers will show their malignity, when they have no

opportunity, nor provocation. But this is no evidence, that they have no malignity. So sinners will not show their malignity, when they have no provocation, nor opportunity. But this is no evidence, that they have no native selfishness and malignity. It is only when their designs and interests are touched, that they will feel and express their malignity. But still it is true that they are by nature, as selfish and malignant as Christ represents them to be, when he calls them serpents, and a generation of vipers, and says that they are of their father the devil, and his works they will do. Hence,

4. They are by nature children of wrath, and heirs of destruction; for they are by practice, children of disobedience and transgressors from the womb. Their native selfishness and malignity deserve eternal death. So Christ plainly declares. "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts, and every action of their lives is evil, and only evil continually. They do nothing but transgress the law of love, and "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." They never have a right exercise of heart, nor do a right action. They are as complete enemies of God, by wicked works, as his first and greatest enemy, who walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; for they are as destitute of holiness, as entirely selfish, and as perfectly malignant as he is. They would, if they had equal power, and were placed under similar circumstances, do as much to oppose God, and destroy the good of the universe, as he has ever done, or ever can do. They as justly deserve eternal death for their total selfishness and malignity, as any of those malignant spirits that are now in the prison of despair. Accordingly Christ has plainly told them, that if they die in impenitence, and unbelief, he will doom them to the same punishment, that he has prepared for the devil and his angels. Such is the character and state of sinners, as delineated by him who perfectly knows their character and state. They are unholy, selfish, malignant, and deserving the damnation of hell. These dreadful traits are to be found in the character of every son and daughter of Adam, while in the state of nature.

This naturally leads us to show,

II. The importance of exhibiting the character of sinners in a clear and intelligible light.

Our Saviour saw the importance of laying open the depravity and malignity of the natural heart in a clear and intelligible manner, though he knew it would disturb the peace and destroy the hopes of many. And there is undoubtedly the same

importance of exhibiting the true character of sinners in a plain and intelligible light *now*, as there was then. For,

1. Unless sinners are made acquainted with the total corruption of their hearts, they cannot understand the gospel. This is founded on the guilt and ill-desert of sinners, and what they cannot understand, without knowing the plague of their own hearts, and realizing their guilty and perishing condition by nature. While Christ was upon earth, he found it extremely difficult to make sinners understand the gospel, and the difficulty lay in their good opinion of themselves. They thought they were whole, and had no need of a physician. He therefore took a great deal of pains to show them the necessity and design of the gospel. He gave them a clear, concise and comprehensive view of it in the third chapter of John. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here Christ represents the gospel as taking rise from the guilty and perishing state of mankind. God so loved a lost and perishing world, as to give his Son to die for their salvation. But while the world are unacquainted with their depraved, guilty, and perishing state, they can see no need of his atonement, nor any wisdom and grace in the gospel. To this cause the apostle ascribes the opposition and contempt, with which the Jews and Gentiles treated the doctrines he taught. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness."

It is impossible for any to understand the gospel, even in speculation, without a speculative knowledge of the total depravity and ill-desert of all for whom Christ died. For why should one die for all, unless all were dead? Why should the Lord of glory veil his divinity with humanity, and submit to all the sufferings he endured before and at his death on the cross, if sinners were not serpents and a generation of vipers, deserving the damnation of hell, from which they could not be saved, without the atoning blood of Christ? A knowledge of the universal depravity of mankind, and of their just desert of eternal destruction, is absolutely necessary in order to understand the way of salvation through the death and atonement of the divine Redeemer. On this account, it is necessary to

lay open the depravity and malignity of the human heart clearly and fully.

2. This is no less necessary in order to make men feel the need of the gospel. There are multitudes, who believe in speculation that the gospel is true, but yet remain insensible of their own perishing need of that salvation which it freely offers to them. The reason is, they do not believe and realize that they are totally depraved, and deserve the damnation of hell. It is necessary to make them *feel*, as well as *believe*, that they have not the love of God in them, that their hearts are full of evil, and that they are enemies to all righteousness, yea, that they are what Christ says they are, serpents and a generation of vipers. It is this character that renders them deserving of that eternal death which is the wages of sin. And whenever they feel this, they will feel their need of that pardoning mercy which the gospel offers to their acceptance. Thus the self-condemned publican felt, when he cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Thus the prodigal son felt, when he came to himself, when he made the resolution, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Thus the three thousand felt, when they were pricked in their hearts by a sense of guilt and cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Thus it is necessary to teach sinners the total depravity of their hearts and their just desert of endless perdition, that they may feel their need of such a Saviour as God has provided, and of such a salvation as he offers to them in the gospel. Besides,

3. It is still more important to lay open, in the fullest and clearest manner, the depravity, guilt, and condemnation of sinners, in order to bring them to a cordial reconciliation to the terms of the gospel. They must see and love that *justice* which condemns them, before they can see and love that *grace* which pardons them. They must cordially accept the punishment of their iniquity, before they can cordially accept of pardoning mercy. Though sinners may fear destruction, and ever so much desire to be freed from it, yet they cannot accept forgiveness from God, before they forgive him for condemning them to eternal death. And they cannot forgive him until they pass the same condemnation upon themselves, and really feel as the penitent malefactor felt and said to his fellow malefactor, while under condemnation, "And we indeed *justly;* for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Without such a cordial self-condemnation, no awakened and convinced sinner can really accept of forgiving grace. Christ came to save those whom

God had condemned, and none will come to him for salvation, until they approve of God for condemning them. This shows the vast importance of teaching sinners, that they are so corrupt and guilty that they deserve the damnation of hell. For though they hear the gospel, they will not understand it; and though they understand it, they will not feel their need of it; and though they feel their need of it, they will not cordially embrace it, unless they see and feel themselves to be what Christ has said they are, "serpents, a generation of vipers," deserving endless ruin.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the native total depravity of sinners has been properly and scripturally described, there is reason to think that many, who profess to believe this doctrine, do not really believe it. All that call themselves Calvinists profess to believe, that all mankind have become morally depraved by the means, or in consequence of the apostasy of Adam. But there are many who believe this universal depravity of mankind, that do not believe any sinner is *totally* depraved. They do not believe that all sinners are naturally destitute of all moral goodness; that they have no true love to God, nor man; and that their hearts are totally selfish and malignant, deserving the description given in the text. But if they do not believe this, they do not believe total depravity in a true, scriptural sense. They only believe universal depravity, which is the common opinion of mankind.

Many who profess to be Calvinists and to believe total depravity, never preach it, but virtually deny it. Though they do, indeed, use the term, *total depravity*, and sometimes professedly preach upon the subject; yet they either neglect to explain it, or explain it away. They more commonly neglect to explain it, and distinguish it from universal depravity; or if they undertake to explain it, they explain it away into universal depravity. For after they have told what they mean by total depravity, they exhort sinners to read and pray and use the means of grace, in order to obtain a new heart. They urge them to persevere in thus seeking and striving for converting grace, by telling them that they are doing their duty, and may expect that God will hear and answer their prayers. Do such preachers believe total depravity in the sense in which Christ and the inspired writers taught it? Do they believe that sinners are totally destitute of all true love to God; that

their carnal mind is altogether enmity against him, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be? Do they believe, that the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord? Do not their common and almost universal exhortations to sinners to continue and persevere in their unregenerate duties clearly prove that they do not believe total depravity in the true scriptural sense? If they believed total depravity in a scriptural sense, would they not draw a scriptural inference from it, that the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord?

How rarely do we find total depravity, clearly explained and taught in any late sermons or tracts? How rarely do we hear total depravity clearly explained and taught from the pulpit? We often hear the doctrine mentioned, and we sometimes hear it explained, but do we often hear the proper inference drawn from it? Do we often hear the reading and praying, the seekings and strivings of sinners represented and condemned as selfish, sinful and highly displeasing to God? Do we often hear sinners exhorted to make a new heart, to repent and pray and submit to God immediately? Why not, if our Calvinistic, Orthodox preachers, who are numerous, really believe total depravity? If they really believe this doctrine, would they not explain it clearly and fully? would they not trace it out in all its serious, interesting, instructive, and important consequences? Would they not represent it as selfish, as malignant, and as destructive as Christ represented it? The most favorable supposition is, that they are not so Calvinistic and Orthodox on the subject of total depravity, as they really think they are.

2. It appears from the description which I have given of total depravity, that the disbelief of it naturally leads men into other gross and dangerous errors. The total depravity of mankind is one of the first and fundamental principles of the gospel; and to disbelieve and deny this fundamental principle must be in itself a great error, and of course, must naturally lead to other great and even fatal errors. And this we find to be true in fact. The disbelief of total depravity in its true and scriptural sense, is the source of some of the most gross and dangerous errors, which prevail at the present day. It naturally leads men to become Arminians, who maintain, that men come into the world as much inclined to good as to evil, and that they continue inclined to good in childhood, youth, and manhood, that they always obey God more or less, and that they never need an essential change of heart by special grace in order to be saved. On this ground, they deny the essential distinction between saints and sinners. Though they

allow that one man may be better than another, yet they suppose that all have some moral goodness, and the worst of men differ from the best only in the degrees of their goodness. They therefore deny the doctrine of personal election, or that God has chosen one, rather than another to eternal life. This is true Arminianism, which is entirely founded upon the denial of total depravity.

The denial of total depravity leads men to become Methodists, who are essentially Arminians. For they deny the doctrine of election, the doctrine of regeneration or an essential change of heart, the doctrine of saints' perseverance, and the essential distinction between saints and sinners. They suppose a sinner may become a saint, without special grace; and consequently may become a sinner again. Their saints are only *reformed* sinners, who may be saints one year and sinners the next; saints one month and sinners the next; or saints one day and sinners the next, as long as they live. This shows, that after all they say about depravity and regeneration, and they say a great deal about both these doctrines, yet they do not believe either, in a scriptural sense. Methodists and Arminians both build their whole scheme of religion upon the denial of total depravity and regeneration, in their true, gospel sense, and therefore are grossly and dangerously erroneous in their religious sentiments.

The denial of total depravity leads men to embrace the Antinomian and Moravian error, which is, that sinners may and ought to love God, merely because he loves them, and that if they do love God on this ground, they will be saved. This Antinomian and Moravian doctrine is vastly more prevalent among Christians in Europe and America, at the present day, than is generally supposed. The famous Chalmers and Irving in Scotland, whose writings are much admired and read in America, teach this dangerous sentiment; and so do some of the most popular preachers at the South. It is a captivating doctrine, and naturally leads those who deny total depravity to embrace it. It is easy to make Christians, and to make them fast, by preaching the pleasing doctrine of Antinomianism. The Moravians are celebrated for their great success in their preaching. Chalmers and Irving have crowded audiences wherever they go.

Those who deny total depravity are prepared to drink in with avidity a totally selfish scheme of religion. The denial of total depravity naturally leads men to become Arians, Socinians, Unitarians, and Universalists. Those who deny total depravity, may easily believe, that men may be saved by an atonement made by a mere dependent, created being, or without any

atonement at all. And upon the same ground, the same persons may become Deists, and renounce the Bible, and depend upon mere unrevealed, natural religion to save them. In short, the denial of total depravity tends to lead men into any and every religious error, that ever was devised or propagated in this erroneous world. There is nothing to hinder those who deny total depravity, from running into one error after another till they arrive at the last error in the series, that is absolute Skepticism; by the four following causes. Either because they are too careless and idle to trace their first error to its final consequence; or because they are incapable of tracing their first error to its final consequence; or because they are afraid to trace their first error to its final consequence; or because they find it unpopular to trace their first error to its final consequence. There is no more absurdity in becoming Skeptics than in becoming Arminians, or Antinomians, or Unitarians, or Universalists, or Deists. Their denial of total depravity is absurd, and after they have admitted this absurdity, there is no absurdity too great for them to admit in any doctrinal error. As the whole gospel scheme of salvation is founded on the doctrine of total depravity; so the denial of this doctrine tends to subvert the whole gospel.

3. If total depravity has been properly and scripturally described, it is easy to see why the gospel is so greatly despised by those in general who hear it. Sinners made light of the gospel in Christ's day, and he predicted, in the parable of the gospel feast, that they would make light of it in time to come. His prediction has been, and is still fulfilling. The gospel has been preached nearly two thousand years, and to almost every nation in the world; but it has been very generally despised and rejected, by Jews and Gentiles. This can be easily accounted for, upon the principle of total depravity, which has a powerful tendency to blind the mind, stupify the consciences, and harden the hearts of sinners. Their understanding is "darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." They have eyes, but they will not see; they have ears, but they will not hear; and they have hearts, but they will not perceive their guilt and danger. They are loth to look within and see the plague of their own hearts, and the danger which results from it. So long as they feel no guilt, they can see no danger. It is strange, that they do not know they are depraved, guilty, perishing creatures; but it is not strange they make light of the gospel, while they feel no need of it. The feelings and conduct of secure sinners towards the gospel,

is one of the most clear and visible evidences of their total depravity. Nothing short of the blinding and infatuating influence of their totally depraved hearts, could lead them to despise the gospel, reject the counsel of God, and run the risk of lying down in everlasting sorrow. And this is the awful effect which the gospel ascribes to total depravity; and which no mere intellectual light or motive can remove.

4. If sinners are totally depraved, it is not strange that they are in deep distress, when the Spirit of God opens their eyes to see their hearts and their lives in a true light. He can bring the divine law home to their consciences, and make them realize that they have broken it, by all the exercises of their hearts and actions of their lives. He can bring God into view, whom they have always despised, disobeyed, and injured. He can bring eternity into view, and make them realize that eternal punishment which they deserve, and to which they are constantly exposed. He can set all their sins in order before them, with the aggravating circumstances that have attended them. And this which he can do, he often does. He awakened three thousand in one day. He has awakened millions since, and some too who were the most stupid, hardened, and obstinate. He is still awakening sinners in one place and another, and he may come into any place, and alarm the most vain, thoughtless, and secure. It is only for the Spirit of God to open the eyes of sinners to see their hearts, which are totally selfish and malignant, and which deserve the damnation of hell, and it would throw them into the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. Let any sinner only have a full and realizing view of his own heart, conduct, and condition, it would plunge him in darkness and insupportable distress. Some sinners may bid defiance to the arrows of conviction, but they may find that a wounded spirit is more than they can bear. They may make light of the doctrine of total depravity, but they could not, if they realized what Christ says they are, and what he says they deserve.

5. We learn from what has been said, that there is a wide difference between awakenings and convictions. Sinners may be awakened and alarmed in the view of danger, while they have no conviction that they are totally depraved. They may be sensible that they are depraved, that they have externally broken the divine law, and are exposed to be lost; while they imagine that their hearts are better than their lives. This excites them to reform, to read and pray, and seek for mercy, with hopes of pleasing God by doing their duty. They imagine that their sincere and ardent desires to escape future

misery, and obtain future happiness, must be virtuous and well pleasing to God. But when they are under genuine convictions, they see that their hearts are totally depraved, selfish, malignant, opposed to God and all good. They see that their hearts are far more evil, and vile, and guilty than their lives; and that God has much more reason to punish them forever for their internal selfishness, enmity, and malignity, than for their external conduct. This cures them of their self-dependence, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness. When they were merely awakened, they knew what to do, and were very ready to do it. But when they are convinced that their hearts, their desires, and prayers, and exertions are totally selfish, sinful, and displeasing to God, they see no hope in themselves, and nothing to prevent their utter despair, but the mere sovereign, unpromised mercy of God. Sinners are never under genuine convictions, until they see the total depravity of their hearts, and that they are such guilty and hell-deserving creatures as Christ represents them to be in the text.

6. This subject shows that all sinners, whether awakened or unawakened, are in a very guilty and dangerous situation. They are all totally depraved, and have been continually increasing in depravity and guilt ever since they have been capable of knowing right and wrong, good and evil. As they have increased in age, they have increased in guilt. As they have increased in knowledge, they have increased in guilt. All they have said, and done, and thought, and felt, has been a transgression of the law of love. You cannot look back upon any of the exercises of your hearts, and actions of your lives, with self-complacency and approbation, but only with self-condemnation. You cannot review the blessings you have enjoyed, without a consciousness that you have abused them all. You cannot review the admonitions you have received from the smiles and frowns of providence, without a consciousness that you have been both ungrateful and incorrigible. You cannot recollect either the private or public religious instruction you have received, without a consciousness that you have hated instruction and despised reproof. You cannot review your hearts and lives, without a consciousness that you have been all your days filling up the measure of your sins, and ripening yourselves for an aggravated condemnation. How then, yourselves being judges, can you escape the damnation of hell? You deserve to be destroyed; God has a right to destroy you, he threatens to destroy you, and he has power to destroy you; and none can deliver you out of his hand. Your feet stand on slippery places, and you may soon slide into the bottomless pit.

Have not some of you lived even to old age? Your day of grace and space of repentance will soon come to a serious and solemn close. Have not some of you passed the meridian of life, and are drawing near to your latter end, and is not your state alarming? And what youth is there in this house, who knows not but that his day of grace may end, and his account may be sealed up before he reaches manhood? Can your hands be strong, or your hearts endure, in the day that God shall deal with you? Prepare then to meet your God; not to contend with him, but to submit to him; not to justify yourselves, but to justify him, and cordially accept the punishment of your iniquities, and cast yourselves upon his sovereign and unpromised mercy. This is your immediate and imperative duty.

This subject now calls upon all to inquire whether they have ever seen the plague of their own hearts. The question is not, whether you have seen and felt that you are a depraved or sinful creature. There is not a single individual but what will readily say this. But can you say that you have seen the total depravity of your hearts, and found yourselves to be as unholy, as selfish, as hostile to God, and to all good, as Christ represents every one in the state of nature to be? If you have not, what evidence have you that you are not yet in your sins, and under the dominion of that carnal mind which is enmity to God? It must be a dark mark to every one who is not willing to answer this question. The essential distinction between a saint and a sinner is this:—a saint is not totally depraved, but has some true love to God and man, some repentance, some faith, some submission, and some reliance on the atonement of Christ for pardoning mercy. On the contrary, a sinner is totally destitute of true love, repentance, and faith, and will not submit unconditionally to a damning God. This is a serious question to every awakened sinner who is inquiring what he shall do to be saved. If there be any such, it is easy to tell him what he is, and what he must be. He is an enemy, and must become a friend to God.

SERMON XXXIV.

VANITY OF THE WORLD.

"ALL that cometh is vanity."—Eccl. xi. 8.

EXPERIENCE holds a dear, but a very profitable school. Multitudes, who will not learn the most plain and important lessons in any other school, often become docile in this. Solomon with all his native wisdom and acquired knowledge, for a long time remained ignorant of the vanity of the world; but by painful experience, he became fully acquainted with it. And after he had learned this very useful lesson, he ardently desired to teach it to mankind in all future ages. God was pleased with this benevolent desire, and enabled him to gratify it, by transmitting his writings to all future generations by the pen of inspiration. Though he suffered his writings on natural history, and natural philosophy to be buried in oblivion; yet he did not suffer his writings upon the vanity of the world to be lost. His Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which contain his experimental knowledge, he has stamped with divine authority, and recorded for the instruction and benefit of mankind in their present probationary state. Men are extremely apt to place their happiness in knowledge, power, and property; and though they have often found these sources of happiness to fail of answering their expectations, still they will hope against hope, and fondly imagine that things to come will prove better than things past. But Solomon tells them in the text, that there is no ground for such an expectation. "All that cometh is vanity." The world and the things of the world will be as vain in time to *come*, as they have been in time past. To illustrate this plain and interesting truth, it is proposed,

I. To inquire wherein the things of the world have been vain in time past. And,

II. To inquire what reason we have to believe, that they will be equally vain in time to come.

I. We are to inquire wherein the enjoyments of the world have been vain in time past. Solomon pronounces the world to be vain, in the most extensive and unqualified sense. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities: all is vanity." This sentiment mankind have universally adopted, either earlier, or later in life. Those who have been raised the highest, and enjoyed the most, in the world, have been as fully convinced of its vanity as those who have been reduced the lowest and suffered the most, among their fellow-men. It cannot be supposed, that mankind in time past would have so universally complained of the vanity of the world, unless they had some way or other been deceived and disappointed in their expectations from it. This naturally leads us to inquire wherein the world has always proved vain to those, who have lived in it, and sought solid happiness, in any earthly possessions, scenes, and objects. Here it may be observed,

1. That the things of the world have always been unsatisfactory to those, who have actually possessed the largest portion of them. Though God has lavished the bounties of providence upon many individuals of mankind; yet those persons have never been satisfied or contented with their external circumstances. None have been satisfied with their wealth, nor with their power, nor with their influence, nor with their greatest prosperity. No man, perhaps, ever had a larger share of what are deemed the greatest and grandest things this world affords, than Solomon. He had more wisdom, more knowledge, more wealth, more fame, and more extraordinary prosperity, than any other king before or after him ever enjoyed. But all these great and splendid objects united, were utterly insufficient to satisfy his rational and immortal mind, and left him in a state of mental poverty and disquietude, which extorted the exclamation, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities;—all is vanity, and vexation of spirit!" "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase." This demonstrates the world to be vain. For if there is no one thing in the world, nor all things in the world, that can satisfy the boundless desires of the mind, then the world must be a vain and empty object to every human soul. Mankind have spared no pains, and left no methods unemployed, to derive satisfaction from the world; but they could never obtain the object of their pursuit. Though some have obtained the wealth they sought, the knowledge they sought, the honors they sought, the power and influence they sought; yet none have found the contentment and satisfaction

they have sought from the world. This carries irresistible evidence of the vanity of all earthly objects and pursuits. If we should search all sacred and profane history, we could not find a single instance of any man's being perfectly satisfied with his worldly attainments and possessions.

2. Mankind in general, have been disappointed in their hopes of gaining the worldly objects of their desires and pursuits. They have hoped to attain a vast many things which they could not attain. How many have endeavored and hoped to attain high degrees of useful knowledge, which they never attained. They have set out with zeal and resolution to make great and rapid advances in their intellectual attainments; but have soon found their health or fortune failing, or all their fond hopes and expectations buried in the grave! How many have flattered themselves with high hopes of wealth, and very nearly realized their wishes, when some unexpected events have thrown them into the depths of poverty! How many of shining and popular talents have hoped to rise to places of great dignity, power, and influence; but have unhappily lost their darling objects, and sunk as far below, as they expected to rise, above others! Many more have been partially, though not totally disappointed in their worldly hopes and prospects. They never accomplished what they hoped to accomplish; they never obtained the wealth which they hoped to obtain; they never rose so high in rank, in knowledge, and respectability as they expected to rise; but suffered the pains of broken purposes and sore disappointments. This has been the common experience of mankind in all ages. Pharaoh hoped to prevent the Israelites from fleeing from his kingdom, and after they fled, to bring them back again, but was disappointed. Balaam hoped to gain the wages of unrighteousness from the king of Moab, but was disappointed. Ahab hoped to go to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, but was disappointed. Haman hoped to humble Mordecai and destroy his nation, but was disappointed. Absalom hoped to dethrone his father, and reign in his stead, but was disappointed. Adonijah hoped to take the kingdom out of the hands of his brother Solomon, but was disappointed. The vain, and foolish, and wicked hopes of all these men were providentially blasted. All worldly hopes and prospects are always liable to such painful disappointments. No men have more sensibly felt and lamented the vanity of the world, than those, who have been raised the highest in hope, and sunk the deepest in disappointment.

3. All the good which mankind derive from the world is always mixed with evil, which renders it extremely vain. Solomon illustrates the vanity of the world by this consideration.

Speaking of prosperity and adversity, he says, "God hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him." And this he experienced himself. Amidst all his prosperity and worldly happiness, he found many and great evils mixed with it to balance it. His brother Adonijah gave him great disturbance. Jeroboam the son of Nebat, spread discord and animosities among his subjects. And afterwards his foreign enemies threatened to destroy his kingdom. The same mixture of good and evil has always fallen to the lot of the highest as well as of the lowest, of the richest as well as of the poorest, of the most fortunate as well as of the most unfortunate, of mankind. When adversity comes before prosperity, it serves to increase prosperity. The adversity of Joseph served to increase his future prosperity, and the adversity of Moses served to increase his prosperity. But when adversity comes after prosperity, it turns prosperity into an aggravation of adversity. In the common course of life, adversity generally comes *with* or *after* prosperity. Many more of mankind have been prosperous in the earlier, than in the later stages of life. This was the case of Eli, of Samuel, of David, of Solomon, of Hezekiah, of Jehoshaphat, and of many illustrious men, whose lives are recorded in the Bible. And we find this to be true in reading the history of the Greeks and Romans. Their illustrious men shone with peculiar lustre in the morning and meridian of life, but after that period, it is painful to read their diminishing prosperity and fading glory. This Solomon observes to be the usual connection between prosperity and adversity. He represents prosperity as coming first, and adversity last. "But, says he, if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many." And to this he immediately subjoins, "All that cometh is vanity." It is real vanity for men to rise in prosperity and sink in adversity. But this is the natural and common course of all earthly acquisitions and possessions, which are not only vain, but often a vexation of spirit.

4. All things which mankind most value and prize in this world are extremely short-lived. It was but a little while Solomon enjoyed the magnificent temple he built, the immense wealth he amassed, and the royal dignity and grandeur, which he displayed before those kings and princes who came from distant nations to see and admire his glory. All mankind from age to age, have been pilgrims and strangers on the earth. One generation has passed away, and another risen in their room. Where are the many millions, who have divided, possessed, enjoyed, and governed the world for nearly six thousand

years past? They have one after another gone down to the grave, and the places, which once knew them, shall know them no more. All their earthly riches, and glory, and power, and magnificence have sunk in perpetual oblivion. Where are the men that lived from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Solomon, and from Solomon to Christ? Their names are blotted out, and their mighty works crumbled to dust. Where are the fathers of our nation, who left us this goodly heritage? They have long since slept in silence. Their possessions have passed from fathers to sons, from the rich to the poor, from the high to the low, till they have fallen into our hands, from which they will soon be taken away. This has always been the rapid succession and transitory nature of all earthly things. And in this respect all men, in all ages past, have experienced the vanity of the world. Though some have had a smaller, and some a larger portion in this life, yet all have found all things in this world equally vain to dying creatures. As they brought nothing into the world, so they could carry nothing out. This led Solomon to say, "As man came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?" So vain have all earthly things been to mankind in times past: they have not satisfied their minds; they have not answered their expectations; they have not been unmixed with evil; and they have not continued so long as they desired and expected they would continue. They always deceived and disappointed all those who have placed their supreme hopes and happiness in them. They could all say either before or at the close of life, what Solomon said in regard to all the world and all its scenes and objects, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities: all is vanity."

That the world has been vain in all the respects which have been mentioned, in times past, none perhaps will deny; but whether it will be so in time to come, many may doubt. This, therefore, I now proceed to show,

II. Will certainly be the case. The text asserts, "All that cometh is vanity." There are very good reasons to believe the truth of this divine declaration, though it has been, and still is generally disbelieved. But if it be true, it is highly important for all to believe and realize it. And to fasten this conviction on every mind, I would observe,

1. That the world will be governed by the same laws of nature, in time to come, by which it has been governed in times

past. This God has assured us in his word. "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." The same natural causes will continue to operate, and to produce their natural effects to the end of time. As they have in time past, produced a mixture of good and evil, so they will continue to affect mankind, as long as they continue in this frail and mortal state. The change of the seasons, the extremes of heat and cold, and the influence of all the elements, will continue to spread innumerable evils and calamities among mankind, which will defeat their wisest purposes, destroy their highest hopes, and involve them in darkness, despondency, and insupportable distress. Nothing but miracles can prevent the laws of nature from operating and producing storms and tempests, inundations, conflagrations, earthquakes, and innumerable diseases, pains, and accidents; and we have no ground to expect so many miracles in time to come, as have been in times past. God will not counteract the laws of nature, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, guard the weak, or save the unguarded from fatal accidents. And if the laws of nature continue to operate, they will necessarily subject mankind to ten thousand natural evils, which must blast their hopes, and diminish, if not destroy, their happiness. It is as natural for this world to trouble and grieve the hearts of the children of men, as for the sparks to fly upward.

2. The world will be governed, in time to come, as it has been in times past, not only by the same laws of nature, but by the same hand of Providence. God always has governed, and always will govern the world by his own hand. He always has exercised a general providence in upholding the world, and preserving the laws of nature; and a particular providence in guiding and directing the laws of nature, to produce just such effects as he saw best to produce. And since the laws of nature will remain the same, and will be guided by the same Almighty hand, there is good reason to expect the same changes and revolutions in time to come, that there has been in times past. If the laws of nature were to be under the direction of a different governor, we might expect they would produce very different effects from those which they have heretofore produced. But since the same hand which always has governed the world will always govern it, there is no ground to look for any material alteration in the world, and the things of the world. All that cometh will be like all that is past, "vanity of vanities." There is still another reason,

3. Why we may expect the world will be as vain in time to

come, as it ever has been; and that is, God will continue to govern the word to answer the same important purpose, which is, to prepare men to leave it, and go into eternity. He never intended that men should live here forever; and therefore he does not mean that this world should ever become a place of perfect rest and peace. Such a state of the world would not be suited to prepare men for their long home, and fit them for their final destination in eternity. A mixture of good and evil, of light and darkness, of joy and sorrow, and of hope and fear, is calculated to prepare them for future happiness, or future misery. God is here forming vessels of mercy, and vessels of wrath, and all the evils and calamities of the world are adapted to awaken their attention, and impress their minds, in respect to things invisible, future, and eternal. If men were never convinced of the vanity of the world, they would never be concerned to secure future and eternal happiness, nor to escape future and eternal ruin. God means to disappoint the hopes, and disturb the peace of mankind, and cause them to feel the necessity and obligation of obtaining the one thing needful. And thousands have been driven from their refuges of lies and carnal security, by realizing the vanity of the world. And it will be as necessary in time to come, as it has been in time past, to govern the world so as to answer his gracious and holy purpose of preparing men for their final and eternal state. They have reason, therefore, to expect that all worldly things will continue vain and short-lived. God has enstamped vanity upon all the great and good things in this life, from the beginning to this day; and this vanity will as certainly continue to the end of time, as he continues to carry on his great work of saving and destroying sinners. And we know he is in one mind, and none can turn him. He is absolutely able to carry into effect his own purpose, and to govern the world after the counsel of his own will. He will employ the world, and all the scenes, and changes, and objects in the world, to prepare mankind for their final and unchangeable state.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If this world always has been and always will be vain, then we see the goodness of God in forbidding mankind to love it supremely. He has forbidden them to place their supreme affections upon it in the plainest and strongest terms. Jeremiah said to Baruch, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." The apostle John says, "Love not the

world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Now hear what Christ, who knew the world better than any other person that ever lived in it, says upon this important subject. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.—But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.—For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?—Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.—Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man, brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich towards God. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Thus the prophet, Christ, and the apostle unitedly and absolutely forbid men to love the world supremely. But these are thought to be hard sayings, and who can bear them? Why should God make such a world as this for the habitation of men, and fill it with ten thousand good things, and then forbid them to love such a good world? This has been the general thought and language of mankind from age to age, and it is still the thought and language of mankind in general. They think hard of God as Adam and Eve did, for

placing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden of Eden, and then forbidding them to eat of it upon pain of death. This was owing to the evil suggestion of the great deceiver. He tempted them to misunderstand, to disbelieve, and to transgress the kind prohibition that God laid upon them. He only forbade them to love the world and things of the world supremely, which he knew would dishonor himself and ruin them forever. From the same kind and benevolent motive, he now so repeatedly and positively forbids mankind to love the world supremely. He allows them to live in the world, and to *use* the world, but he forbids them to *abuse* it. To love the world supremely, is to idolize it, and abuse it, and render it vanity of vanities and a vexation of spirit. The world is perfectly adapted to make men holy and happy, when they love it, and use it in subordination to the glory of God. But when they love it supremely, and make it the source of their only and highest happiness, it totally prevents their loving and enjoying God, and deprives them of temporal and eternal happiness, and prepares them for future and eternal disappointment of all their fond desires, and hopes, and expectations. It is in mercy to men, that God forbids them to love the world supremely, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. God does not forbid the young or the old, the rich or the poor, to love the world supremely, to destroy, but to promote their happiness, both in time and eternity. And for this, they have abundant reason to be thankful.

2. Since God is good in forbidding men to love the world supremely, he must be equally good in requiring them to love him supremely. There is no other way in which it is morally possible to cure men of their supreme love to the world. They are naturally lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. The world is exactly adapted to gratify their corrupt and selfish hearts. Though Christ has told them, and Solomon has told them, and the apostles have told them, and their own experience has told them, that the world is utterly vain as a source of happiness to rational and immortal creatures; yet they will not renounce their supreme love to it, until they love God supremely, and take him for their supreme portion. As supreme love to the world excludes supreme love to God from the heart, so nothing but supreme love to God, can exclude supreme love to the world from the heart. So long as the men of the world know no other source of happiness, they will love it supremely, notwithstanding they know it has disappointed, and will disappoint their hopes and happiness, which they have placed in it.

It is kind in God, therefore, to require them to love him supremely, and derive their supreme happiness from the enjoyment of his favor, holiness, and blessedness. And as soon as they do love God supremely, they immediately renounce the world and the things of the world as vanity of vanities, and a vexation of spirit. This our Saviour illustrates by a pertinent and instructive parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls: who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." God knows that men will not renounce the world, until they have found and secured a higher and more permanent source of happiness in the love and enjoyment of himself. He knows they must renounce worldly, in order to enjoy spiritual happiness, and he graciously commands and invites them to do it. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come, and buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." God manifests his goodness in requiring men to love him supremely, because it is morally impossible for them to be completely and forever happy without giving him the supreme affection of their hearts. Man must love God supremely, or love the world supremely. If they love God supremely, they must be happy; but if they love the world supremely, they must be wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. This is God's world, in which none can be happy, until they love him more than father or mother, son or daughter, houses or lands, or any of the good things which the world affords.

3. It appears from what has been said, that this world is suited to make good men better, and bad men worse. Good men love the world in obedience to God, and bad men love the world in disobedience to God. Good men view every good gift and every perfect gift as coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. Bad men overlook the hand from which all their temporal blessings come, and love the gifts and not the Giver. Good men love God supremely, and the good things of the world

subordinately. They value life, and health, and property, and every species of outward prosperity, as means and motives of gratitude and obedience to God. All the good things of the world which they enjoy, raise their attention and affections to God, and serve to increase their holiness, happiness, and usefulness. These were the happy effects, which the expressions of divine goodness had upon David. He looked through all secondary causes, and saw the heart and hand of God in all the temporal good things with which he was favored and distinguished. These inspired his heart with gratitude and filled his mouth with praise. He says, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" This is the language of the hearts of all good men under the reception of divine favors. But the blessings which God bestowed upon the sinners of Zion, produced directly opposite effects, and served only to blind their minds, harden their hearts, stupify their consciences, and prepare them for future and final ruin. This world is every way fitted to make good men better, and bad men worse. It is a good world to good men, and a vain world to vain men. Men have no ground to complain of God for making such a world as this in which they live, and filling it with ten thousand good things, which he has required them to use, and not abuse. If they use this world in obedience to his commands, it cannot fail to fit them for another and better world; but if they abuse it, it cannot fail to prepare them for another world of woe and wretchedness. Thus mankind have been, from age to age, using and abusing the world. Those who have used it obediently and gratefully, have made to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, who have received them into everlasting habitations; while those who have disobediently and ungratefully abused it, have made to themselves enemies of God and of all holy beings to all eternity.

4. It appears from the vanity and goodness of the world, that all who live in it are in a state of trial. This world is so full of good things and of evil things, that no one who lives in it can help choosing good, or choosing evil, or help doing good, or doing evil. This world is so full of agreeable and disagreeable objects, and of agreeable and disagreeable changes, revolutions, and events, that no one can help being thankful or unthankful for the various objects with which he is surrounded, and the various scenes through which he is called to pass. By these cir-

cumstances every person, without exception, is put into a state of trial, whether he will obey or disobey God, and enjoy his smiles, or suffer his frowns forever. Christ was in a state of trial as long as he lived in this world. This Satan knew, and therefore offered to give him all the good and glory of the world, if he would disobey his Father, forfeit his favor, and defeat the great and glorious work of man's redemption. But when he was tempted, he resisted and condemned the tempter for his presumption, fraud, and falsehood. Adam was in a state of trial before he sinned, and all his posterity, from age to age, have been in a state of trial ever since. God here exhibits himself and the world before the eyes of mankind, and gives them a fair opportunity to choose him for their portion, or to choose the world for their portion, and they cannot avoid making a choice, and a choice which shall determine their future and eternal destiny. Every person, whether young or old, whether poor or rich, whether low or high, is tried every day by all he sees, and hears, and knows, and enjoys, and suffers. His heart is continually in motion, and loves either God, or the world supremely, which renders him worthy of praise or blame, reward or punishment. After mankind have come into the world, they are obliged to be in a state of trial; for they are obliged to see the vast variety of beautiful and attractive objects with which they are surrounded, and to love them supremely or subordinately, by which they become either the servants of God, or the servants of sin. Whether they do or do not know, that they are in a state of trial, yet God is actually trying them, and preparing them to be vessels of mercy, or vessels of wrath. This world was made to be a place of trial to all mankind, and so long as they live in it, it is the most solemn and interesting situation in which they can possibly be placed. They have everything to gain, or lose in this short probationary state. Every creature, every object, and every event with which they are connected, may have a powerful influence in forming their characters and fixing their condition for eternity. This is a serious world, and it deeply concerns all who are living in it, to realize that their probationary state is rapidly coming to a final and solemn close, when they must give account of the things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.

5. If this world will be as vain in time to come, as it has been in time past, then it is very unwise as well as sinful, for any to expect to escape the dire evils and calamities, which have commonly fallen to the lot of mankind. In times past, some of the richest have become the poorest; some of the high-

est have become the lowest; some of the most prosperous have become the most disappointed, and some who expected a long life, have met an early death. The circumstances of mankind have always been suddenly and unexpectedly changing; and generally changing not for the better, but for the worse. Prosperity has generally gone before adversity, and given adversity peculiar pain and bitterness. The same dreadful changes and revolutions are to be expected by those who are placing their supreme affections and dependence on this vain and delusive world. They are pursuing a forbidden path, which naturally leads to dire disappointment and sorrow. God knows their hopes are vain, and has forewarned them of their folly. He says, "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever.)—Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling-places to all generations. This their way is their folly." It is the extreme of folly for them to act in contrariety to the declarations of God, the experience of all mankind, and to their own experience. They have always found the world to be vain. They have never obtained all the objects they have sought, and those which they have obtained, have never given them the satisfaction they expected from them, but been mixed with disappointment. The longer they pursue lying vanities which cannot profit, the more unwise, inexcusable, and wretched they are, and will be, until they seek and obtain the enjoyment of God.

6. The vanity of the world shows the duty and importance of early piety. The young are apt to imagine, that they ought to be excused from giving their hearts and lives to God. They seem to claim it as a right to rejoice in their youth, and let their hearts cheer them in the days of their youth, and to walk in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes, putting far away the thoughts of death and another world. But this is an egregious and dangerous mistake. God gives them no leave to live without him in the world; but commands them to remember their Creator now in the days of their youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when they shall say, we have no pleasure in them. Yea, he solemnly declares, that for all the days they spend in vanity he will bring them into judgment. No blank in time or in duty, has God ever made or meant to make. The young live in God's time and in God's world, which he allows them to *use*, but not abuse. So long as they love the world, and the things

of the world supremely, they rob God of his glory, deprive themselves of pure and permanent happiness, and abuse their time, their talents, and all the favors bestowed on them. The young and inexperienced are continually exposed to ten thousand snares and dangers in this vain and evil world, and nothing can afford them security, but early piety. This will guard them against the god of this world, who goes about as a roaring lion to deceive and destroy the young, the thoughtless, and the stupid; and against the men of the world who are deceived and deceivers. It is the immediate and important duty of the young to remember their Creator, to love and serve God, and to acknowledge him in all their ways, that he may guide their paths. The morning of life is a season of peculiar trial. God is now loudly calling upon the young to forsake the men, the manners, the customs, and the spirit of the world, that lies in wickedness and is full of all manner of evil. And if they neglect to hear his voice now, they have every reason to fear that they never will hear it. For the world is gaining stronger and stronger hold on their hearts, and they are as constantly losing strength to resist its corrupting and dangerous influence. Look upon those who have arrived at manhood; has not the world a stronger hold on their hearts, than it had in their childhood and youth? Look upon those in the meridian of life; are they not more entirely under the dominion of a worldly spirit, than they ever were before? and pursuing the vanities of the world with redoubled ardor and enterprise, the spirit which is now astonishingly reigning all over the world? Look upon those in the decline of life; has time, or trouble, or disappointment, or sorrow, taught them the vanity of the world, and led them to take God for their portion? No, they are the nearest to death and the farthest from the kingdom of heaven. All these descriptions of men were once as young as you are; but they forsook God in the morning of life, and God has forsaken them, and there is the utmost reason to fear, that he always will forsake them. Now, consider the world will be as vain in time to come, as it has been in times past; and you see how vain and fatal it has been to those that have gone, and are still going before you in the love and pursuit of vanity. It has blinded their eyes, hardened their hearts, seared their consciences, and brought some of them to the very side of the bottomless pit. And what can you expect, if you cast off fear and restrain prayer before God, and disobey him in your childhood and youth? The world will deceive and destroy you. But there is now some hope in your case. The impressions of pious, parental instructions may not be wholly erased from your

minds, and God says to you, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me."

Finally, this subject warns all the worldly-minded of their danger and duty. These may be much more numerous than they are ready to imagine. All belong to this class who do not love God supremely, but place their supreme affection upon the world and the things of the world. To all such the world is extremely dangerous; and unless they renounce it, it will destroy them. It has had this effect in the time past, and will continue to produce it. This danger imperiously calls upon the worldly-minded, to return to God and take him for their final portion. They must soon go out of this into another world, where nothing but supreme love to God, can fit them for pure and permanent happiness. There is no room, nor excuse for delay. God calls and invites them to renounce all their vain hopes from the world, and to trust in his mercy.

SERMON XXXV.

FEAR OF MAN.

"THE fear of man bringeth a snare."—Prov. xxix. 25.

I SHALL first explain the meaning of this divine maxim, and then illustrate the truth of it. And,

I. Let us consider what that fear of man is, which bringeth a snare.

There is a fear of man, which generally proves a safeguard rather than a snare. I mean that awe or perturbation of mind we feel at the presence and observation of men. This is a constitutional weakness, which is more troublesome than dangerous. It is a restraint from, rather than temptation to any species of presumption or misconduct. This natural timidity is what is commonly termed diffidence or modesty, and stands directly opposed to arrogance or vanity. There is another fear of man, which is both safe and commendable. It is that deference and respect which individuals ought to have for the just opinion of the public. The public have a right and a capacity to judge of the external conduct of every individual, and he ought to revere and regard the just opinion of the public. When an individual knows the general opinion of the world respecting the rectitude of his general or particular mode of acting, it ought to have weight and influence upon his mind and exterior conduct. Whenever we have a proper sense of our own weakness and liability to err, we must be convinced, that others may form a juster estimation of our moral conduct, in many cases, than we do ourselves. And on this account, every individual ought to have an habitual awe, veneration, and respect for the public eye, which continually observes and criticises his visible actions and moral conduct. Such a proper respect for the public opinion appears beautiful in any person in any rank or condition of life; and while it commands esteem, it leads to that

mode of conduct which deserves it. This fear of man serves to protect men from danger rather than to expose them to it. For we seldom find any who are devoid of it, except those who have lost their character, and become incorrigibly wicked, and are under no restraint but the fear of punishment. The question still returns, What is that fear of man, which bringeth a snare? I answer, it is the fear of doing right, lest we should lose the favor or incur the displeasure of our fellow-men. Some are afraid of losing the favor of mankind. They thirst for their approbation and applause. They cannot bear the thought of losing public respect. And when duty calls them to act against it, they are afraid to act, lest some should form a lower opinion of them. Some are afraid of the displeasure and resentment of men. And when they ought to do what they apprehend will excite the displeasure and opposition of others, they are afraid to do their duty. Others are still more afraid of the contempt and sneers of the multitude. They fear, if they follow the dictates of their conscience, some will reproach and vilify them. The fear of unjust reproach may have a greater and more general influence upon mankind, than the fear of losing the favor, and incurring the displeasure of their fellow-mortals. But all men are, however, more or less prone to fear either the one, or the other, or all the evils which have been mentioned, which has led thousands into very dangerous and destructive snares. This was so common in Solomon's day, as to become a proverb in Israel. And there is no reason to think, that it is less common now than it was then. I proceed,

II. To illustrate the truth of the maxim, that the fear of man bringeth a snare.

The description which has been given of this fear shows, that it naturally tends to lead men to deviate from the path of duty, and in that sense is ensnaring. But Solomon appears to mean more than this, and suggests that the fear of man imperceptibly leads those who indulge it, where they did not intend to go, and plunges them into evils which they did not foresee. That it has such an ensnaring influence will apppear, if we consider,

1. That it leads men into such sins as they never expected to commit. When any begin to give way to the fear of man, they generally mean to give way to it only in the present instance, and under what they deem a present necessity. They do not mean to make a practice of yielding to such unmanly motives. They would despise themselves, if they realized that this would be their common conduct. It is, therefore, only in extreme cases, that they mean to suffer themselves to be diverted from duty, by the fear of man. But here lies the snare,

for when they have once given way to the fear of man, they find themselves still under the influence of the same bias, and still more constrained to act agreeably to it. They first neglect some small duty through the fear of man. This leads them to neglect another, and another of more importance. From the same motive, they begin to commit what they imagine is a smaller sin; and then another and another, until they are holden by the cords of their iniquities. For, they soon find that the more they yield to their fellow-mortals, the more they will endeavor to awe them into compliance. And the further they go, the harder it is to retreat and throw off the fear of man, which compels them to follow the multitude to do evil. There is no doubt but thousands, in youth and in riper years, have been, in this way, led into natural and moral evils which they once would have trembled to think of. But though they are not always thus gradually led into atrocious wickedness; yet they are very often led to perpetrate deeds that they never expected to be guilty of. Aaron was a friend to God. He loved him with supreme affection. He abhorred idolatry. And no doubt while he saw the greatness, the goodness, the sovereignty, and justice of God in the wonders he wrought in Egypt, he had no thought that he should ever be guilty of bowing down to a dumb idol; nor did he once anticipate, while he heard the ten commandments proclaimed with divine authority and solemnity from mount Sinai, that he should violate the very first command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." But within less than forty days from that solemn scene, he was led into gross idolatry. He made a golden calf, which was a snare both to himself and the people. And what led him into this dreadful snare? Was it not the fear of man? For when Moses reproved him for it, he had no other excuse to make. "Thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief."

The disciples of Christ all professed to be firmly attached to him, and doubtless they really thought, that they never should forsake or deny him. But the fear of man led them into a snare. They all forsook him in a trying hour, and one of them denied him. They were afraid not of the power or displeasure, but of the reproach of their fellow-mortals.

Pilate was a courtier. He sought popular applause. He had probably risen to his high power and authority, by courting the favor of the great. He shaped his life and modes of conduct to the humors and caprice of those who had power of raising him to places of honor and dignity. But finally he was put to the severest trial. The most important cause came before him, that ever did or could come before a human tribunal.

The Lord of glory is arraigned as a criminal, and he is obliged to sit the supreme judge in the case. What shall he do? The witnesses called, proved contradictory and insufficient. The populace clamor. His wife tells her dreams, and admonishes him of the danger of condemning the innocent. He washes his hands instead of his heart from wickedness, and begs to be allowed to release the immaculate Redeemer. The people urge his death with greater importunity and vehemence, and declare that nothing short of it will satisfy them. But Pilate still declines to gratify their malignant wishes. At last, however, an irresistible motive is suggested. "The Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend.—When Pilate heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat," and gave sentence of death against the Judge of all the earth. To please the Emperor of Rome, he sacrificed the Sovereign of the universe. And to escape the momentary displeasure of man, he exposed himself to the everlasting displeasure of God! To such lengths in wickedness will the fear of man carry those who suffer themselves to be governed by it. No one can tell beforehand to what extent the fear of man may carry him in guilt, in shame, and misery.

2. The fear of man proves a snare to those who yield to it, by leading them into the very evils which they mean to avoid. They mean by the compliance, to secure the favor and shun the displeasure, frowns, and reproach of their fellow-men. But the unlawful and unwise method they take, indirectly tends to defeat their ultimate design, and involve them in the evils they meant to avoid. Mankind are selfish, unjust, unstable, fickle, and capricious. As they are very mutable in their purposes and pursuits, they cannot be pleased very long by those who take the most care to please them. And when they find that any have either designedly or undesignedly pleased and flattered them to their disadvantage, they become their bitter enemies. Hence says Solomon, in the fifth verse of the context, "A man that flattereth his neighbor, spreadeth a *net* for his feet." Those who take undue pains, and use unjust means, to secure the favor or avoid the displeasure of such as they fear, very often spread a snare both for their own feet and the feet of others. For when those whom they have attempted to gratify, find that they have been gratified to their hurt, they resent the deception that has been practiced upon them. When Peter affectionately presumed to dissuade Christ from the path of duty, he indignantly frowned upon him. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and

chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Peter undoubtedly expected to please Christ, but he highly displeased him; because he advised him to neglect his duty, which would have ruined him and all mankind. Christ wisely saw and magnanimously avoided the fear of man which bringeth a snare. Saul wished to maintain and secure the throne of Israel to himself and to his family; and to obtain this end, he yielded to the fear of man. When he was sent to destroy the Amalekites, he was directed to wait till Samuel came, before he gave battle. But while he waited, the people grew impatient, and began to scatter from him. He feared he should lose their favor, and give the Amalekites advantage against him. He forced himself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering before Samuel came, which he had no right to do. It was the part of a priest, and not of a king, to offer sacrifices. But in this case he yielded to the fear of man, by which he lost his end, and incurred the evils which he meant to have escaped. For Samuel told him, that if he had not disobeyed, the kingdom should have been established in his hands, and in the hands of his posterity; but now it should be taken away, and given to a better man. David feared the reproach of man, which led him to commit murder, and made him the song of the drunkard. Jonah feared that his prophetic character would be sullied in the eyes of the world, if he obeyed the divine command to go to Nineveh, which led him into a dreadful snare, that well-nigh ruined him. The fear of man has deterred thousands and thousands, all over the world, from pursuing the known and plain path of duty, and drawn them into unsuspected, unavoidable, and fatal snares. It has led some to knavery, some to perjury, some to theft, some to robbery, some to murder, and not a few to suicide. It is a snare which each individual lays for himself, and therefore it is of all snares the most unsuspected. Every one who yields to the fear of man, means by yielding to secure and promote his own safety and interest, while he is pursuing a path that leads to the destruction of both; and whatever betrays men to counteract their duty, safety, and happiness, must be very ensnaring. This will further appear, if we consider,

3. That so far as we yield to the fear of man, we always neglect the proper use of our own wisdom, prudence, and

foresight. These rational powers every one who is not an idiot possesses to a greater or less degree. They were given to us for the great and good purpose of guiding us in duty, and guarding us from danger. But the undue influence of the fear of man, brings a mist and cloud over the mind, and its rational and moral powers, and prevents us from properly exercising our reason, conscience, and natural sagacity, to discover our duty and our danger. Of course we blindly fall into the snares we have set, or others have set for us. Every person in the world is exposed to the blinding and perverting influence of the fear of man, for every one sees some whose displeasure he is, for some reason or other, unwilling to incur. Children are loth to incur the displeasure of some of their mates. Youth are more reluctant to incur the displeasure of some of their associates. The rich man, and the great man dreads to incur the displeasure of his intimate connections. The men in power dread to incur the displeasure of their constituents. Even the king on the throne fears to displease some of his subjects. And this fear has a blinding influence upon the understandings and intellectual powers of all persons of all ages, ranks, and conditions. The fear of man is the most universal, the most imperceptible, and the most dangerous snare in the world. It lies in every one's path, and is seldom seen until it is too late. The child does not see it till he is caught. The youth does not see it till he is caught. The rich man and the great man, the wise man and the good man, do not see it till they are caught. Let the wise man, the good man, and the bad man, look back upon the past scenes of life, and they will probably find, that in many, if not in most, instances in which they have deviated from the path of duty, they have been ensnared by the fear of man. The opinion of the world has a most powerful, imposing, and formidable influence upon the minds of men, and betrays them into innumerable unwise, unsafe, and dangerous modes of conduct. It is extremely dangerous to live in this ensnaring world, where none can be safe, but those who sincerely and firmly resolve to resist the fear of man, and to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the love and fear of God.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said concerning the nature and tendency of that fear of man which bringeth a snare, that it is a free, voluntary, sinful fear. It is a fear of doing right instead of doing wrong; which is a moral and not a natural

fear. A natural fear, or a fear of natural evil or danger, is passive and innocent. The animals are afraid of danger or natural evil when they see it. Mankind are naturally afraid of danger or natural evil when they see it. Christ himself was afraid of danger or natural evil when he saw it. He resisted Satan's temptation to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, which he knew would prove fatal to his life. Mere natural fear of natural evil or danger is neither voluntary, nor criminal. But the fear of doing right instead of doing wrong, is a free, voluntary, moral evil. And this is that fear of man which bringeth a snare. There is never any just ground to fear doing right, but there is always just ground to fear doing wrong. The fear of doing right is a fear directly opposite to the fear of doing wrong; and therefore the fear of doing right is just as free and voluntary as the fear of doing wrong. The fear of doing right is wrong, and the fear of doing wrong is right. The fear of doing right is dangerous, but the fear of doing wrong is safe. Solomon says, "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely." The apostle Peter demands of Christians, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" When Peter and John were examined and condemned for preaching the gospel, by the Jewish council in Jerusalem, they answered and said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." As every person must answer this question in the negative, so he must a similar one; whether it be right for him to fear man more than to fear God, or to fear doing right more than to fear doing wrong. The fear of God never bringeth a snare, but the fear of man always does. The fear of man in its own nature and tendency is altogether criminal and dangerous. The fear of doing right is one of the first and greatest faults that children and youth are guilty of, for which all parents justly blame them. When children and youth disobey their parents' commands, and plead in excuse, that the fear of displeasing their associates led them into the snare; though their parents, in some cases, may allow this to be a palliation of their offence, yet they will not allow it to be a full justification of it, and generally no justification at all. It is sinful to suffer the first rising of the fear of man, and much more criminal to cherish it and follow it in its destructive tendency. It is in its very nature dishonorable to God and to religion, and in its tendency destructive of the peace, safety, and happiness of the souls of men both in this life, and in that which is to come. It is that evil propensity, which being conceived and cherished, "bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished,

bringeth forth death." It is one of the most insensible, universal, and fruitful sources of the sins and miseries of mankind. It is ensnaring in the morning, in the meridian, and in every stage of life. It has led thousands and thousands blindfold into innumerable unexpected, unforeseen, and fatal natural and moral evils. It is reigning more powerfully and extensively at this day in this land, than it ever did before. It is triumphing over the best parental, political, and religious laws, regulations, and restraints. All ages and classes seem to be afraid of doing their duty, lest they should forfeit the favor and incur the displeasure of their fellow-mortals. Such a fear is unwise, unholy, unsafe, and extremely sinful and dangerous.

2. If it be criminal to fall into the snares which others have laid, it must be much more criminal to lay snares for others. Mankind are as naturally inclined to lay snares for others, as to fall into the snares which others have laid for them. They are as prone to deceive, as to be deceived; to ensnare, as to be ensnared. But they generally take much more pains to deceive, than to be deceived. The deceived take no pains to be deceived, and often take pains to prevent deception, though they are very generally and finally overcome. But the deceivers generally use all the art, cunning, and subtilty they possess to deceive. They, therefore, who lay snares, contract the greatest guilt. They act with their eyes open, but the deceived act with their eyes shut. They mean to injure, if not destroy those they ensnare; but the ensnared have no thought or intention of injuring those who have laid snares for them. These are inexcusably and aggravatedly guilty of the blood of those whom they have knowingly and designedly injured or destroyed. This malignant practice has greatly prevailed in every age and every part of the world, and drawn down a heavy load of guilt upon ensnarers. You remember the conduct of the Israelites at mount Sinai, who laid a snare for Aaron. Their sin was extremely great and heinous in the sight of God, who seemed to be resolved to destroy them utterly, and would have done it, had it not been for the powerful intercession of Moses. When Caleb and Joshua returned from searching the land of Canaan, and gave their report, "All the congregation bade stone them with stones;" by which they meant to intimidate and prevent them from doing their duty, in speaking and maintaining the truth. The laying of this snare was highly displeasing to God, for which he doomed those that laid it, to wander and perish in the wilderness. The fear of man was a snare which the Scribes and Pharisees laid to deter men from hearing and embracing the doctrines of Christ. They threatened to cast them

out of the synagogue, which undoubtedly, in some cases, had the effect intended, and ensnared the timorous. It is certain, however, that it was by the fear of man, that they ensnared Pilate, and brought about the death and crucifixion of Christ; which was the great national sin that provoked God to destroy their city, and scatter them as a poor, miserable, enslaved people among the nations of the earth. Infidels are laying a snare for our promising young men in every learned profession. Errorists are laying a snare for the orthodox. The vicious are laying a snare for sober, inexperienced youths. And people are laying a snare for their rulers. The snare laid in all these cases is the fear of man. And multitudes are continually snared and taken, while they are blind to the future, dreadful consequences. But how can those who are laying this snare, answer it to God and to their own consciences? Though the ensnared are guilty, yet those who lay the snare have the greater sin. How fast do such ensnarers increase everywhere, and in this place in particular. They are entreated to pause, and consider the dreadful evils they are drawing down upon themselves and others. Though they may repent, reform, and be forgiven, how can they bear the thought of seeing the ruin of those whom they have led into the paths of sin and destruction! It most seriously concerns them to remember, that while they are laying snares for others, they are laying more dangerous snares for themselves. While Jeroboam the son of Nebat, made Israel to sin, he became a greater prodigy of guilt, and a more signal monument of divine justice. This holds true of all who lay snares for others. They become the greatest sinners, are the least likely ever to come to repentance, and are the most exposed to the greatest condemnation and punishment. This dreadful consequence they might foresee, and would foresee, if they did not deceive themselves more than they deceive others. David represents the ensnarer as making a pit, and digging it for others, but eventually falling into it himself. This is the awful fate that all ensnarers have reason to fear.

3. We may learn from what has been said, who are the most liable to be drawn into the snare which others lay for them. They are those who are most afraid of losing the favor, and incurring the displeasure of others. Though none are entirely free from this fear of man which bringeth a snare; yet some, by their natural disposition, or by their peculiar situation and circumstances, are more liable to be drawn from the path of duty by the fear of man, than others. This fear originates in childhood. As soon as children begin to associate to-

gether at home, or abroad, or at school, they naturally strive to get the ascendency over one another, and one or another never fails to obtain his object; and after he has obtained it, other children seek his favor, and fear his displeasure, by which he insensibly leads them to follow his example, or comply with his advice. If he is disobedient to his parents, they are inclined to follow his example, and disobey their parents. Or if he disobeys his teacher at school, they still wish to please him, and dread to displease him, and of course disobey their teacher, notwithstanding all their parents have said to them to make them docile and obedient. This early fear of man grows with their growth, and increases with their years. Children and youth, therefore, are the first and most exposed to the fear of man that bringeth a snare. How often do parents, masters, and mistresses find, when they call one child or another to account for their misdemeanors at home, or abroad, or at school, the poor, deceived delinquents plead in excuse for their faults, that such or such a child led them astray by flattery or frowns? One youth in a family sometimes gains the ascendency over father and mother, brothers and sisters, and leads them all into dangerous and destructive snares. One youth in a neighborhood sometimes gains an ascendency over his associates, and draws them into snares, which their parents forewarned them to shun, and which tend to ruin them both in this life and the next. How many children and youth, here and elsewhere, have fallen, and are still falling into the snares which those who, by art and deception, have laid for them!

Parents, next to children and youth, are the most liable to be drawn from the path of duty, by that fear of man which bringeth a snare. Though it might be expected that their maturer knowledge, observation, and experience would enable them to detect and avoid this snare, yet melancholy facts prove their peculiar danger. This is owing to two powerful causes. One is, their unreasonable fondness to gratify the unreasonable desires of their children. This fondness their children very early discover, and learn to improve it to what they deem their own advantage. They ardently plead to be gratified in those things in which they see other children gratified, with whom they wish to associate. This argument plays powerfully upon the fondness of parents, and leads them to gratify their children in some smaller points, which leads them to plead with greater importunity for greater and greater indulgences. The parents are then caught in the snare which their sagacious children have laid for them, and from which they cannot easily extricate themselves, when another cause co-op-

erates with their parental fondness; I mean the example of other parents, whose favor they wish to secure, and whose displeasure they wish to escape. They see other parents, whom they consider wiser, richer, and more respectable than themselves, indulge their children in fine apparel, in relaxation from business, in attending balls, card-parties, and the dissipation which naturally follows. They dare not be more rigid than other parents, nor more cruel to their children, which might sink their spirits, and obstruct their future respectability. How many parents have been caught in this snare, which their children and other parents have laid for them! Did not David fall into the snare which his sprightly son Absalom laid for him? His father's heart was bound up in this darling son, so that we are told, "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" Into such a snare the fear of man has brought thousands and thousands of too indulgent parents. And how many too indulgent parents are there, and how extremely liable are they to fall into the snare which their children and others are laying for them! Let those who think they stand, take heed lest they fall!

Professors of religion are in a peculiar manner liable to be awed and deterred from doing some particular duties, by that fear of man which bringeth a snare. They are very liable to neglect two duties, through fear of incurring the displeasure of their brethren, or of the world, or of both. The apostle says to professors, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Though this be a plain, important, Christian duty, yet is there any which professors are more prone to neglect? The cause is obvious. It is the fear of man. One professor is very reluctant to exhort or reprove his brother, lest he should incur his displeasure, and very possibly the displeasure of others, both in and out of the church. Very few sincere professors fail of seeing, at one time or another, a brother or sister deviating from the path of duty, and needing the advice and admonition of pure brotherly love; but through fear of man very often neglect their duty, which they have bound themselves to discharge. Paul was more faithful in exhorting and reproving the faulty. He says, "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other

Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" This was a plain, cutting reproof of brotherly love. Paul avoided the snare in which Peter and others were taken; and all professors ought to follow his example. Professors ought not only to exhort and reprove one another occasionally, for smaller missteps, but to censure one another for open and gross transgressions. This they are directed to do in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. But though the nature and importance of the duty, and the manner of performing it, be there clearly pointed out; yet professors in general are apt to neglect it, through the fear of man. They are not only afraid of the resentment of the delinquents, but of the frowns of the world. The men of the world wish to lay a snare for professors of religion, if they faithfully reprove and censure sin in their brethren or others. This was the case in Isaiah's day. He says there were such as would "make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought." Professors are in peculiar danger of falling into this snare, which those that are within and without lay for them.

Ministers of the gospel are not among the least liable to be led astray from the path of duty, by the fear of men. They know very well that their main strength and support lie in the good opinion and friendly feeling of those to whom they minister. If they say or do things in the discharge of their office, which displease their people, their frowns alone are sufficient to ruin them. They stand upon a weaker foundation than any other professional men, or members of civil society. Are they not then in peculiar danger of deviating from the path of duty, either to gain the favor, or to avoid the displeasure of those upon whom they are so entirely dependent? What say facts in this case? Had not Elijah much to fear from Ahab? Had not Jeremiah much to fear from those who cast him into the dungeon? Had not Amos much to fear, when Jeroboam sent Amaziah the priest to warn him of his danger? "Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." But Amos did his duty, notwithstanding the snare laid for him. Had not our

forefathers much to fear from Queen Mary and her bishops? I might mention nearer and later instances of this kind. But I forbear. The state of ministers speaks for itself. They are certainly very liable to be awed and diverted from duty, by the fear of man that bringeth a snare.

Nor are civil rulers out of danger from this quarter. Under our free government, they all, from the highest to the lowest, stand upon the suffrages of the people, who are given to change. Legislators are in danger from their constituents, who are generally seeking their private interests, instead of the public good. There are many now endeavoring to divert the attention of the general government from the general good, in order to answer their own private, selfish purposes. But executive officers are in the most danger of being perverted from the path of duty, by the fear of man. They more immediately and sensibly feel their dependence upon the good opinion of the people, who have already gotten a too great ascendency over them. They have broken over the good laws which have been made to prevent the profanation of the Sabbath, profane swearing, gambling, and tavern-haunting. They have shut the eyes and mouths of informing officers, who dare not do their duty. How many among our executive officers have stumbled and fallen, and been snared and taken!

Now, my hearers, if you believe the truth of what has been said, you may be ready to inquire, what shall we do to guard ourselves against that fear of man which bringeth a snare, and exposes to so many natural and moral evils? We are in danger in every age, and in every stage, and in every situation of life, while we live in this ensnaring world. Is there no possibility of escaping the danger, to which we are constantly and everywhere liable? There is undoubtedly a natural possibility of avoiding every snare that leads to the neglect of duty, and the commission of sin. If you really desire to guard yourselves against the corrupting and ensnaring fear of man, perhaps, you may find some benefit by following a few plain and practicable directions. And,

1. Become acquainted with yourselves. Learn what weak, feeble, depraved, and dependent creatures you are. You are not sufficient of yourselves to think anything as of yourselves, but all your sufficiency is of God. Only look back upon every period of your past lives, and your own experience will tell you, when, and where, and how you have been led into snares by the undue fear of man. You may recollect what foibles and follies, and mistakes and misdemeanors the fear of man led you into in childhood, youth, and maturer years. This knowledge

of yourselves will have a tendency to make you very cautious of such persons, such places, and such things as have led you from the path of duty into the path of folly, sin, and sorrow.

2. Form a just estimate of the men of the world. There is no occasion of mixing unnecessarily with the world, in order to form a just estimate of the men of the world. Read the Bible, and there you will find their character and conduct drawn to the life. There, you will be told, that "they are all gone out of the way," that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one," and that "there is no fear of God before their eyes." Surely their company is not to be chosen, their advice is not to be heard, and their example is not to be followed. They are all laying snares for one another, as well as for the people of God. Solomon says, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood." Hear this advice of the wisest of men, and obey the command of him who is wiser than he: "Beware of men." This important knowledge of the world may be a very great safeguard. It will teach you to be as wise and cautious as Nehemiah was, when Sanballat and Tobiah laid a snare for him. He understood human nature too well, to put any confidence in their flattering proposals, and pursued his duty in safety. Trust not in man, nor in the son of man; but trust in the Lord Jehovah in whom is everlasting strength, and who keepeth all who stay themselves upon him, because they trust in him.

3. Live watchfully and prayerfully. Pray daily, pray always, pray without ceasing. This duty God has enjoined upon all men for their good. He that heareth prayer sees all the snares that are laid for the innocent, and can break them whenever he pleases. And he has broken them in ten thousand instances in answer to the sincere prayers that have been made. Acknowledge God by prayer in all your ways, and he will direct you, and lead you in plain and safe paths.

4. And finally, be truly religious, and maintain the fear of God in your hearts, and this will effectually cure the fear of man which bringeth a snare. The fear of God excludes the fear of man. Mordecai found this to be true. Elijah found this to be true. Peter and John found this to be true. And real Christians ever since have found this to be true. Hence Solomon lays it down as a universal truth in the verse which contains the text: "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." Be therefore in the fear of the Lord every day and all the day, and the

fear of man cannot ensnare you. Pursue your duty, and you will be out of the reach of the fear of man, for who will harm you, if you do that which is good? So long as any are destitute of the fear of God, they will be under the corrupting and dangerous influence of the fear of man.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE DUTY OF SINNERS TO GO WITH SAINTS TO HEAVEN.

"Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law. We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."—Num. x. 29.

AFTER Moses had conducted the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, he came to mount Sinai, where he remained for more than a year. Whilst he was here, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian came with his son to mount Sinai, and continued with him till he was about to pursue his journey into the wilderness. Then Moses said to Hobab, the son of Raguel, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." As the people of God desired Hobab to go with them to the land of promise, so what Moses said to him may be considered as what saints say to sinners, "Come with us, and we will do you good, for God has spoken good concerning us." The spirit of the text may be comprised in the general observation:

That saints desire sinners to go with them to heaven.

I shall first show that this is the desire of saints, and then inquire why sinners should comply with their desire.

I. The first thing to be considered is, that saints desire sinners would go with them to heaven. This is evident, from the fact that all who are walking in the way to heaven possess a pure, benevolent, heavenly spirit. They feel, in a measure, as the heavenly inhabitants feel towards sinners. We know that they rejoice, when sinners repent of sin, turn to God, and walk with the godly in the way to Zion; for there is joy "in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just

persons which need no repentance." Since saints possess a heavenly spirit, they must desire that sinners would forsake the paths of the destroyer, and walk with them in the ways of wisdom and paths of peace. Though they cannot consent to walk with the wicked in their present course, yet they sincerely desire, that the wicked would turn their feet into the path of righteousness, and walk with them in the way to eternal life. They would not be saints, if they did not desire that sinners should become saints, and bear them company in their journey to heaven. This further appears from the character of saints as drawn by the pen of inspiration. The prophet represents them as saying to all around them, as Moses said to Hobab, "Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." Elijah lamented that he was left alone, and none would walk with him in the paths of piety. The children of Zion also said, "The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts." They lamented that sinners would not unite with them in attending divine ordinances and promoting the cause of God. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." This is the language of the Church to those that are without, by which they kindly invite them to come with them to the table of Christ, and walk with them in the way of holiness through this world to the world of glory and blessedness. Let us now inquire,

II. Why sinners should comply with the desire of saints, that they would go with them to heaven. And here it may be observed,

1. A compliance with this desire of saints is reasonable, because it is one of the strongest desires of their hearts. Though they desire the temporal good of sinners, yet they desire their future and eternal good much more. They had much rather see them walk in the way to heaven, than see them walk in the path to wealth, or honor, or any outward prosperity. This is their strongest desire in respect to sinners in general, and more especially in respect to their friends and connections in particular. Pious parents more ardently desire, that their children would walk with them in the way to heaven, than that they would walk with the men of the world in the pursuit of the greatest and noblest objects of their supreme regard. They can conceive of no greater joy in respect to their children, than to see them walking in the truth. Moses felt a stronger desire, that the children of Israel should walk with him to

heaven, than even to go there himself. His desire was put to the test. God threatened to destroy them, and to make of him a great nation. But his benevolent heart could not endure the thought. "Blot me," says he to God, "I pray thee, out of thy book." Let me, rather than they perish. Paul felt and expressed the same ardent desire for the salvation of the Jews. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Now, if saints have such strong and ardent desires, that sinners should go with them to heaven, it seems reasonable, that they should comply with their desires. Sinners are often ready to gratify saints in some respects, and why should they not be still more ready to gratify this most ardent desire of their hearts. By complying here, they would give the greatest satisfaction to saints, who would rejoice over them and with them to all eternity.

2. Saints not only ardently desire, that sinners would go along with them to heaven, but they ardently desire it from the best of motives. It is because they love them, and wish to do them good. Moses had a benevolent motive in desiring Hobab to go with him to Canaan. "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Saints wish well to sinners, and it is because they wish well to them, that they desire they would go with them to the heavenly Canaan. Others may desire them to walk with them in the paths of the destroyer. They may say, "Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse." Those who invite sinners to walk with them in such wicked ways, act from low, mean, selfish, and malevolent motives; which ought to be decidedly and indignantly rejected. But the invitations of the righteous, which flow from pure benevolence, are worthy of all acceptation. It is, therefore, perfectly reasonable, that sinners should gratify the pious and ardent desires of saints, by going with them in the way of holiness to the heavenly Canaan.

3. It is reasonable that sinners should comply with the desires of saints to go with them to heaven, because they have no good excuse for not going with them. For, in the first place, they are able to go. They have as much strength to

travel in the path of saints, as to travel in their own path. Hobab was as able to go with Moses to the land of promise, as to go back to the land of Midian. Sinners are as able to walk in the strait and narrow path to heaven, as to walk in the crooked paths to ruin. They cannot plead their want of power, strength, or ability, as an excuse for refusing to go with saints to heaven. Nor can they plead, that conscience forbids them to go with saints in the path to heaven. For it is the way which God himself has marked out for all men to walk in. It is what the prophet Samuel calls "the good and the right way." It is the best way in which they can go, and their consciences will condemn them so long as they walk in any other path. Nor can they plead, that it will hurt their temporal interests, to go with saints in their way to heaven. For "the blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." If sinners walk with the ungodly, they have no ground to expect prosperity in this world, nor in the next. But if they walk with saints in the path of piety, this will give them courage and resolution to pursue their secular concerns for the noblest purposes and highest rewards. God has spoken good concerning saints. He has promised to walk with them, while they walk with him. He has engaged to manifest himself to them as he does not to the world. He has promised to give them grace and glory, and to withhold no good thing from them. Thus sinners can go with saints better than they can go alone in their own way. It is altogether reasonable, that they should gratify the desires of saints, by going with them to heaven, since they have no good excuse for refusing to go.

4. This is reasonable, because they have as much need to go to heaven as saints have. The Israelites felt their need of going to Canaan. They expected it was a good land, which would afford them a great many good things. This Moses suggested to Hobab. "We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Canaan was a good place, and on that account, a proper type of heaven, the seat of the highest holiness and happiness in the universe, which contains the best inhabitants, the best employments, and the best enjoyments. It is full of light, and joy, and peace. It completely satisfies the desires of all who are admitted there. This saints believe, and desire to be fixed in the mansions of the blessed. They cannot stay here long; they must go somewhere. This world is not their home.

They are wretched, and miserable, and guilty. But heaven is just such a place as they need. It will remove all the evils which have fallen to their lot, and supply all their wants. Their souls are precious, and heaven will make them happy. But the souls of sinners are as precious as the souls of saints. They are under the same sentence of condemnation that saints were under before they embraced the gospel, and set their faces Zionward. They must leave this world as soon as saints. They must go somewhere, and they have to make their choice in this life, and either choose to go with saints to heaven, or to go in their own chosen path to destruction. When saints, therefore, desire and invite them to go with them to heaven, it is highly reasonable that they should gratify their desire, and bear them company to that happy place, which the Lord has promised to all who are willing to go and take possession of it. Their guilty, perishing condition imperiously requires them to quit their own present path, and walk with saints in the way to heaven.

5. Saints are not only capable, but disposed to do sinners a great deal of good, if they will come and walk with them in the way of life. This Moses suggested to Hobab to induce him to go with the people of God to the land of promise. "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." Sinners might derive great benefit by associating with those who are heavenly-minded, and journeying to a heavenly country. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." If sinners would forsake the foolish, and walk with the wise, they could not fail of becoming wiser and better. Good men mutually promote each other's spiritual edification and growth in grace. They not only attend divine ordinances together, but they converse together on religious subjects, and remember one another at the throne of grace. Paul tells the Romans, the Philippians, and the Thessalonians, that he remembered them before God. David said to God, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts;" they are "the saints that are in the earth, the excellent, in whom is all my delight." Though David was king, and conversant with the great men of his court and his kingdom, yet he chose to be a companion of the *good*, rather than of the *great*. It is proverbial, that whatever company a man keeps, it will have a happy or unhappy influence to form his character and govern his conduct. This influence every one who comes out from the world and walks with the godly will most sensibly and happily realize. How happy were the first converts to Christianity with their new connections! Saints never fail to do sinners good, when they

renounce the men of the world, and walk with them in the paths of wisdom. Their invitations and promises are sincere, and sinners may safely confide in them. Though they may lose the friendship of the world, which is enmity to God, they will gain the favor of God, and the friendship of his friends, who will never forsake them through time and eternity; being heirs of the same promise, they will possess the same eternal inheritance. But,

6. If sinners reject the invitation of saints to go with them to heaven, they will do them a great deal of hurt. Saints will have something to do with sinners, whether they desire it, or not; and all they say and do for their good will turn against them. Their desires, their invitations, their exertions, will turn against them, and serve to harden their hearts and fit them for ruin. If they refuse to go with them, they will pray that their desires, designs, and hopes may be blasted. The children of Israel invited all the nations as they went along to Canaan, to unite with them and serve the God of Israel, that the good which God had promised Israel might be their portion. But they refused, aud upon their refusal, the prayers of Israel turned against them, and proved the means of their temporal and eternal ruin. The prayers of Moses proved the ruin of Amalek, of Korah and his company, and of the seven nations of Canaan. While saints now, like Moses, invite and pray that sinners would go with them in the way to heaven; they at the same time, like Elijah, make intercession against them, if they refuse to comply with their invitation. The effectual, fervent prayers of the righteous avail as much now as ever they did to bring good, or evil to sinners. The young, the vain, and the stupid, have reason to tremble at the dreadful consequences of refusing to remember God, and to walk with his friends. Saints everywhere are daily praying, that the kingdom of God may come, and the kingdom of Satan may be destroyed, which is virtually making intercession against all incorrigible sinners. They have but one alternative before them; they must either accept, or reject the invitation of saints to walk with them. And can they hesitate what choice to make? It is life to walk with the godly, but death to walk with the ungodly. For,

7. Those who walk in the narrow path, and those who walk in the broad path in this world, will never meet in another world, but be finally and eternally separated. Our Saviour said a great deal about the future separation of the wicked from the righteous. He said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to de-

struction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." He said in the parable of the tares, "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." He said, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to the shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." In the parable of Dives and Lazarus he said, "that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments," and plead for relief, but could obtain none. So that he was forever separated from Lazarus. In the view of these plain and repeated declarations and representations of Christ, who can doubt, whether those who refuse to walk with the righteous in this life, will not be separated from them in the life to come? But it will be a dreadful thing indeed to the wicked to be separated from the righteous in a future and eternal state, for they will be separated in the most serious, interesting, and important respects.

They will be separated in their affections. Saints will be filled with pure, holy, benevolent affections, but sinners will be filled with the most impure, unholy, and malevolent affections. Saints will perfectly hate and abhor the character of sinners, and they will perfectly hate and abhor the character of saints.

They will always remember one another, and never cease to exercise diametrically opposite affections towards one another. And while this alienation of affections, will not disturb the blessedness of the righteous, it will fix daggers in the hearts of the wicked.

They will be separated in their condition. While the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father, which is full of peace, joy, holiness, and happiness; the wicked will be confined in chains of darkness, sin, and guilt. And while the righteous enjoy the love and approbation of all the heavenly world, the wicked will sink down under the frowns of God, and the detestation of the whole intelligent creation. The righteous will enjoy the happiest place in the universe, while the wicked will be banished from it, and consigned to regions the most loathsome and tormenting to rational beings.

The separation between the righteous and the wicked will be great and dreadful in another respect. It will be final and eternal. This gives an awful emphasis to their separation. If there were a prospect of their ever becoming united in affection and situation, it would vastly alleviate the pains of separation to the wicked. But there is a great gulf fixed between hell and heaven, so that there is no passing from the one to the other. Those who shall be banished from the light of heaven will be confined in regions of darkness, where light and hope can never come. Cain will never meet Abel; Pharaoh will never meet Moses; Absalom will never meet David; nor Judas ever meet Paul in heaven. While the wicked at the last day go away into everlasting punishment, the righteous will go away into life eternal. The wicked may *now* escape an everlasting separation from the righteous, if they will only comply with their kind and cordial invitation to walk with them in the way to heaven. Does not their duty and eternal interest concur to persuade them to renounce the paths of the destroyer, and cordially unite with saints in their journey to the heavenly Canaan!

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Since saints are going to heaven, and invite sinners to go with them; by refusing to go, they manifest great stupidity. They are as able to walk in the path of saints, as saints are to walk in their own path. They have no reason to fear meeting any difficulties in the path of saints, which have not been surmounted by thousands, and may be surmounted again. They have no reason to fear any fatal dangers, which have not been,

and may not be again avoided. They have no scruples of conscience, whether it be *right* to walk with saints in their way to heaven. And they have no reason to doubt whether they would regret it, if they should actually arrive at the mansions of the blessed, and be put into the full and everlasting possession of them. Why then should they feel easy and happy while they perseveringly refuse to accept the invitation of saints, to go with them in the way to heaven? They have some motive, or see some cause for refusing. And what can that cause be but stupidity? They do not realize that saints are walking in the path to heaven, nor that they are walking in the path to hell. If their opinion be true, why should they quit their own path for the path of the righteous? If they have nothing to gain by walking with the righteous, and nothing to lose by walking in the way of their hearts, why should they give themselves any concern about the paths they walk in? This is the feeling and reasoning of nothing but carnal stupidity. For they have abundant cause to realize that saints are actually on their journey to heaven, and that they are actually pursuing the path to destruction. God has plainly told them this in his word; and saints are continually sounding this in their ears. Why do they not realize this most momentous truth that ever was told them? It is because they are unreasonably and obstinately stupid, and their stupidity shuts their eyes. To this God, who knows them better than they know themselves, ascribes it. He says, "They are like the deaf adder, that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." The truth of this declaration is confirmed by observation and experience. For when sinners do realize that saints are pressing into the kingdom of heaven, and that they are walking in the path of the destroyer, they are greatly alarmed, and no longer feel it a matter of indifference whether they walk with the men of the world, or with the men of God. They will confess and condemn their past stupidity, and crowd around saints, and ask with anxiety, what they must do to be saved. Let any sinner in this house only realize that saints are going to heaven, but he is going to hell, and he would shudder at the prospect of an eternal separation from God, from heaven, and from all good. Or let any sinner in this house ask himself why he felt so easy in refusing to accept the pressing importunity of Christians to walk with them in their way to heaven, and he can ascribe it to no other cause than his stupidity, or not realizing that any are going to heaven, or any going to endless perdition. The stupidity of a rational creature consists in disregarding

good, and disregarding evil. And the stupidity of sinners consists in their disregarding their own eternal good, and their own eternal misery. This stupidity is now reigning and destroying the souls of men almost everywhere.

2. It appears from what has been said, that sinners have an invincible aversion to going to heaven, which no means nor motives can overcome. God has brought the kingdom of heaven near to them. He has described its beauty, holiness, and felicity. He has opened a plain and pleasant path to it. He has invited and commanded them to walk in that path. And he has threatened to banish them from his presence, and from all good, and fix them in a state of unutterable and eternal woe, if they refuse to walk in it. But in view of all these alluring and alarming motives, they absolutely refuse to go to that holy and happy place. The ministers of Christ, the friends of Christ, and their own nearest and dearest friends, are incessantly and tenderly inviting and urging them to walk in the way of holiness to eternal life; but they will not yield to their importunity. This demonstrates that they have an evil heart of unbelief; a carnal mind which is enmity against God; and a fixed determination to pursue the path to death. This is true of all sinners, whether thoughtless, hardened, awakened, or convinced. They know enough about heaven to hate it. They know enough about God to hate him; and God says, "All they that hate me love death." But after all that God has said to them, and ministers have said to them, and saints have said to them, they do not believe that their hearts are "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." They imagine they desire to go to heaven, and intend to go to heaven, and hope they shall one day be willing to go to heaven. Here they rest in security, and repel all the arrows of conviction pointed at their hearts and consciences. If they were wise, they would be wise for themselves; but if they continue to despise the good land of promise, they will never enter there.

3. It is easy to see, in the view of this subject, that though there are no good reasons why sinners should refuse to walk with saints in their way to heaven, yet there are powerful motives to induce them to refuse. They love those with whom they are walking in the broad road to destruction; but hate those who are walking in the narrow path to heaven. Christ forewarned his followers to expect that sinners would not walk with them in the way to heaven. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore

the world hateth you." And the apostle John, speaking of enticing sinners, says to Christians, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them." The men of the world love the world, and speak of the world; and sinners love to be in their company, and hear their agreeable conversation. They love the men of the world, and the men of the world love them. They choose to walk with those whom they love, and those who love them. This makes them extremely loth to leave their own company, and walk with those who are heavenly-minded, and speak of heavenly things. This is the case of those who are pursuing the vanities of the world. This is the case of those who are pursuing the vices of the world. And this is the case of those who are pursuing the paths to wealth, honor, and fame. They will not allow any of their associates to leave them, without suffering their sneers or frowns, which few have fortitude to meet and despise. Sinners love sinners because they are sinners, just as saints love saints because they are saints. While on the other hand, sinners *hate* saints, because they are saints. Their hatred of saints is repulsive, and their love to sinners is attractive; and this repulsion and attraction are powerful motives to induce them to walk with sinners, and to refuse to walk with saints. Nothing that God can say, or a minister can say, or a saint can say, or a parent can say, or that their own conscience can say, is sufficient to destroy the influence of these two powerful motives, and persuade sinners to forsake the foolish, and walk with the wise. It is not strange, therefore, that those who love sin and hate holiness, who love sinners and hate saints, should refuse to walk with saints in the way to heaven, and choose to walk with sinners in the broad road to destruction. They are alienated from God and his friends "through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts." They are beyond the reach of human means and rational motives, and must perish, unless God subdues their hearts and forgives their sins.

4. We learn from this subject, that none can get to heaven, without leaving sinners and going with saints. There is but one path to heaven, and saints are walking in it. Those, therefore, who are walking in different paths must forsake them, and walk with saints in the only path to heaven. This many think is a hard condition, which they never intend to comply with, and hope to get to heaven without complying with it. They are willing that saints should pursue their own course, if

they will let them alone in pursuing theirs. They are willing that saints should do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God; if they will only allow them to omit these hard duties, keep their own selfish hearts, and act agreeably to them. If they love the ways of wisdom, they are willing that they should walk in them; but they are not willing to walk with them, for two cannot walk together unless they are agreed, and love one another. They do not love saints in this world, though they hope to love them in another, and they do not mean to walk with them in this world, though they intend and hope to meet them in another. They mean to be friendly to saints and friendly to sinners, and see no occasion of differing in respect to the different paths they are walking in. They do not believe that all men will be saved; but they believe that they can be saved, without going the full length with saints, or the full length with some sinners. They mean to go with saints, if they be not too strict and rigid in their principles and practice; and to go with sinners, if they be not too openly and grossly erroneous and vicious. They would not wish to belong to either class exclusively, nor to be considered as either saints or sinners. This class of almost Christians and almost sinners, is probably the largest class of men who live under the light of the gospel. They are much more numerous than all real and nominal Christians and profligate sinners taken together. But does the gospel allow them to believe, or others to believe that they are going to heaven together in this mixed company? The gospel requires real Christians to come out from the world, to profess Christ before men, and to walk together in pure brotherly love, in the path to heaven. Not many noble, not many mighty, not many great, not many learned, not many rich men, can stoop to these humiliating terms of salvation. But they must stoop to them, take up their cross, and follow Christ in the path to heaven which he has pointed out, or they will never reach the kingdom of glory. They must not only externally come out from the world and walk with Christians, but they must actually love them, and love to walk with them, because they are Christians. They must not be ashamed of Christ, or of his friends, or of his doctrines, or of his cause, but actually promote it. Now, if this be the character of real Christians, have you any reason to believe, that they abound in our churches and religious congregations, at the present day? Are they not scarce in this place? How few do externally walk with Christians? How many endeavor to walk with both saints and sinners? How difficult is it for a young man, for a middle-aged man, and especially for an old man, to come out

from the world with whom he has walked, and openly unite with Christians in putting on a decided character, and walking with them to possess the promises? Be not deceived, if any man have not the spirit of Christ and of his friends, he is none of his, and cannot enter through the gate into the city, but must perish with those that are without.

5. We may learn from what has been said, the inconsistency and danger of delaying sinners. There are many who intend some time or other, to walk with Christians, but are waiting or delaying for a more convenient season to do it. This is the case of many children of pious parents, who have given them up to God, and invited and urged them, with tears in their eyes, to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and walk with them in the way to heaven. Their pious education, has often produced resolutions to forsake the foolish and live. But their hearts have hitherto been with the foolish, and not with the wise. Still they intend in some future time, to walk with wise men and be wise; and they flatter themselves, that they shall fulfill their serious resolution. But what reason have they to think so? The longer they walk with the wicked, the more loth they will be to leave them, and the more loth they will be to walk with the righteous. This they know to be true, by their own experience. Their conduct in delaying is inconsistent with the dictates of their reason and conscience, and what God and his friends have told them. And this inconsistency, which becomes more and more habitual and powerful, continually increases their danger of losing their souls. The inconsistency and danger of sinners more advanced in years, is still increasing by their longer delay. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Sinners are as constantly walking as saints are, and they will as soon get to their journey's end; and they must continue to walk in the path they are in, or turn out of it, and walk with saints. But the longer they delay to turn out of it, the more reluctant they will be to do it. Now let me ask the whole body of delaying sinners, whether you have any reason to expect, that you will ever turn your feet into the path of God's testimonies? You are very capable of feeling the inconsistency of your conduct, and the criminality of this inconsistency. Awake then from your stupidity, and show yourselves men.

6. It appears from this discourse, that those who finally refuse to walk with saints in their way to heaven, must bitterly and forever reflect upon the folly and guilt of their refusal. They can never forget with whom they chose to walk. Dives could

no more forget Lazarus who was comforted, than himself who was tormented. Those who finally walk through life in the paths of the destroyer, can never forget those with whom they walked, nor those with whom they refused to walk. They will remember, that saints are in light, while they are in darkness; and that saints are comforted, while they are tormented. They will remember how kindly and tenderly saints invited them to leave their crooked paths, and walk with them to heaven; and how artfully and malignantly the wicked invited them to shun the paths of the righteous, and bear them company in the path to perdition. The remembrance of these things will be a perpetual and everlasting source of self-reproach and self-condemnation. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" God himself demands of the sinner, "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?" Whether God will inflict any external punishment on the finally impenitent, or not, their inward reflections will be a source of unutterable misery and despair. This has often partially appeared before they left the world.

7. This subject calls upon all to inquire and determine in what path they are walking. There are but two essentially different. The one is holy, and the other unholy. The one is straight, and the other is crooked. The one is safe, and the other dangerous. The one leads to a blessed immortality, and the other to a miserable eternity. You have all walked in the wrong road, and know what it is; and some have walked in the right road, and may know what it is. Now be so good to yourselves as to inquire whether you have ever turned out of the wrong into the right road? When did you turn? Why did you turn? With whom are you now walking? Who now claim you as companions? Those in the right road, or those in the wrong, or both? These are serious questions, which you can and ought to answer according to truth. Some in the right road are ready to answer, and some in the wrong road are equally ready to answer. But there may be many who have allowed themselves to live in doubt. Why stand ye halting between two opinions? It concerns you to determine, and to tell the world that you have determined. Let saints run, and not be weary, walk and not faint in their pilgrimage to heaven. Let sinners stop and turn about. Let them forsake their way, renounce their thoughts, and let them "return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

SERMON XXXVII.

THE HOPE OF CHRISTIANS IN CHRIST.

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."—1 Cor. xv. 19.

Though Paul preached the gospel plainly and fully for nearly two years in Corinth, yet, soon after he left that place, there came in false teachers, who destroyed the peace and purity of the large and promising church which he had planted and faithfully instructed. Among other gross and dangerous errors, they denied the resurrection of the dead, and, consequently, the existence of the soul in a future state. The apostle, having heard of their errors and divisions, wrote this epistle to them; in which he reminds them how plainly he had preached on the subject of the resurrection, and how absurd it was in them to deny that doctrine, after they had professed to believe the gospel which was founded upon it. He points out the absurdity of the error which they had imbibed, by a long chain of plain and conclusive reasoning. He says, "I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once: after that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain: but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it were I or they, so we preached, and so ye believed. Now if Christ

be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God, that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For, if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." From these premises, the apostle draws a plain and just conclusion in the next words. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." He here means to declare, that he and all true believers had a hope in Christ, which was not confined to this life only, but extended to future scenes and objects that lay beyond the grave; and that it was this hope in Christ, which alone prevented them from being of all men most miserable in this present evil world. According to this construction of the text, it warrants us to say,

That true believers would be of all men most miserable, were it not for the hope they have in Christ. In order to illustrate this very interesting truth, I shall first show what hope true believers have in Christ; and then make it appear that they would be of all men most miserable, were it not for that hope.

I. I shall endeavor to show, what hope true believers have in Christ.

None are true believers but those, who have been born again; who have passed from death unto life; who have repented of sin; who have become reconciled to God; who have renounced all self-dependence and self-righteousness; who have become united to Christ, and place their sole dependence on his atonement for pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. Hence says the apostle, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Such true believers are the only persons, who have a well-grounded hope in Christ. And the question now before us is: what does the hope, which true believers have in Christ, imply? Here it may be observed,

1. That it implies an expectation that they shall be completely forgiven, or saved from that everlasting punishment

which they have deserved, through the atonement which Christ made for sin on the cross. Peter said to awakened and convinced sinners on the day of Pentecost, "Repent ye, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." And Paul said in his discourse in the synagogue at Antioch, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." And he said to the Thessalonians, who had turned from idols to serve the living and true God, that they "waited for his Son from Heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered them from the wrath to come." All true believers have solid ground to hope that their sins shall be forgiven, and they shall never come into condemnation, but be freed from all future punishment.

2. 'All true believers have reason to hope that they shall be completely purified, sanctified, and made perfectly holy. They have the promise of the Spirit to carry on a work of sanctification in their hearts. Paul says to the Philippians, "I thank God upon every remembrance of you, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." We are told that "Christ gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." And again we are told, that "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." "The grace of God that bringeth salvation," saith the apostle, "hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Thus it appears from the very design of the gospel, that it gives those who cordially embrace it a right to hope that they shall be saved from spiritual as well as eternal death, and made perfectly holy in the world to come. And

the apostle John tells us that Christians in his day did entertain this glorious and blessed hope. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

3. All true believers have good reason to hope for a future and eternal existence after death. When death comes, and dissolves the connection between the soul and the body, it appears to put an end to the existence of both. Nor can it be proved, from the bare light of nature, that the souls of men survive their bodies after death. We are entirely indebted to the gospel for the infallible evidence we have, that mankind will have a future and eternal existence beyond the grave. Some of the wisest heathen were in doubt about a future state, and the Sadducees in Christ's day absolutely denied the existence of the soul after death. But Christ brought life and immortality clearly to light. He taught that though men may kill the body, yet they cannot kill the soul. He said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die." He represented Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being still alive. And we are told that Moses and Elias appeared and conversed with him on the mount of transfiguration. We read also of the general assembly of the church of the first-born, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, who are now in heaven. All true believers have good ground of hope in Christ, that, though their bodies must die, yet their souls shall live and exist forever in a future and eternal state beyond the grave.

4. Those who cordially embrace the gospel, have reason to hope that their bodies, after having crumbled to dust, shall be raised again, and re-united to their pure and happy spirits. The ground of this hope is founded entirely on Christ. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body could not be discovered by the light of nature, and all the evidence we have of it, we derive solely from divine revelation. The Epicurean philosophers derided Paul for preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And there were some, it seems, in the church at Corinth, who denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. But Paul condemned and disproved their erroneous opinion. "Now," says he, "is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every

man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's, at his coming." "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus Paul and the primitive Christians had solid ground to rejoice in the hope of their bodies being raised, after they had mouldered to dust, incorruptible and immortal; and all true believers have the same ground for the same glorious and blessed hope.

5. Those who believe and embrace the gospel, have just ground to hope that they shall be amply rewarded for all their faithful services, sufferings, and self-denial. Christ assured his followers, that they should be amply rewarded for all they did and suffered for his sake. He said, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Paul says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' All these great and precious promises of future and eternal rewards are made to all true believers, who have a right to hope to receive them and enjoy them forever. Moreover,

6. Those who understandingly and cordially believe in Christ, have a firm foundation to hope, that, when they shall be absent from the body, they shall be present with the Lord, and united with all holy beings in the full and everlasting enjoy-

ment of all good. Christ said concerning all his sincere followers, "Many shall come from the east, and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." And he said to his sorrowful disciples just as he was about to leave them, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." At the same time, he prayed for them, saying, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." All true believers are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, and shall share in all the holiness and blessedness of the heavenly world. On this ground, Paul had a right to say to Christians, "All things are yours: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." To this rich and immense inheritance the apostle Peter directs the eyes and hearts and hopes of Christians. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last times." In Christ he represents them as rejoicing "with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." We must believe what is written is true; "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." He hath, from the foundation of the world, prepared a kingdom for them, in which he will collect and unite them all together, and cause them to know all that he has done, that Christ has done, that the Holy Spirit has done, and all intelligent creatures have done, to raise them to the highest degrees of holiness and happiness forever. Such are the blessed hopes in Christ, that all true believers have a right to maintain and cherish, while they are passing through the changing and trying scenes of the present life. These are an anchor to their souls, both sure and steadfast, and afford them a perpetual source of strong consolation, under all the sufferings and fiery trials they are called to endure, before they inherit the promises. And now, it seems as though we may easily believe,

II. What the apostle said he believed, that, if Christians should have hope in Christ in this life only, they would be of all men the most miserable. For,

1. If their hopes in the great and precious promises of the gospel should be cut off, they would enjoy less happiness than other men. Christ forbids his followers to lay up treasures on earth, and requires them to lay up treasures in heaven. He commands them to seek first the kingdom of God, and to renounce the world as the source of their happiness. The apostle says to Christians, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Christ said that the man who found the treasure hid in the field went and sold *all* he had and bought it; and the man who found *one* pearl of great price did the same. Love to Christ and the gospel creates an aversion to the love of the world. Hence says the apostle in allusion to the cross of Christ, "By whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." True believers cannot serve God and mammon, or enjoy God and the world, at the same time. Hope in Christ destroys that hope which the men of the world derive from it. This David found to be true. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." All real Christians enjoy less worldly happiness than other men.

2. They suffer more natural evils than other men. This Christ forewarned his followers to expect. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." When one came and said unto him, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest: Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth: I am not come to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." He expressly told his disciples, that they should be despised, hated, persecuted, and put to death for his name's sake. Some or all of these dreadful evils the primitive Christians actually suffered. They might, therefore, well say, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." The offence of the cross has not yet ceased. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus," shall suffer more or less for condemning, restraining and opposing the men of the world. Notwithstanding the spirit of persecution has for many years subsided in the Christian world;

yet we have no certainty that it will not revive again. The spirit of the world is now as hostile to the spirit of the gospel as ever it was; and if restraints should be taken off from the enemies of Christ, they would make his friends feel the full weight of their unrelenting and mortal malignity, and cause them to be of all men most miserable in respect to external sufferings, if their hope in Christ should be cut off. It must be further observed,

3. If the hopes which believers have in Christ fail them, they would of all men meet with the greatest disappointment, which would make them of all men the most wretched. The men of the world derive more happiness from hope, than from any other source, though their hopes are confined to this life only; and a disappointment of their worldly hopes often gives them the keenest pain and anguish of heart they ever feel. But what are their hopes, bounded by this momentary life, compared with the glorious and blessed hopes which believers have in Christ of the future and eternal inheritance of the saints in light? And, should they be disappointed in their future and eternal hopes, they must be of all men the most wretched and miserable. How would Paul have felt if he had lost his hopes of that crown of righteousness, which he expected the righteous Lord would give him at the last day? He has told us in the text how he would have felt; that he would have been of all men most miserable. And the same disappointment would sink all who have hopes in Christ, in the same darkness and despair.

I shall conclude at present with one reflection. Those who have a well-founded hope in Christ, may find great pleasure and benefit in celebrating the memorials of his death. This sacred ordinance directly tends to revive and strengthen their too low and languishing hopes of the holiness and blessedness of heaven, to which they are now heirs, and in which they will soon participate with God, with Christ, with the Holy Spirit, with the spirits of just men made perfect, and all the heavenly host. They ought to cherish their hopes, which will cherish all their other graces, and animate them in all their Christian duties. The apostle said to the Hebrew Christians, "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope to the end." Have you not found pleasure and benefit in coming to the table of Christ? You may now find the same.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If the gospel inspires those who cordially embrace it with hope of perfect holiness and blessedness in the world to come, then real Christians are the most happy men in this life. They live upon hope, and their hope is in Christ, who is the only immutable foundation of hope. For he is the same yesterday, today and forever, and because he lives, those who hope in him shall live also. Hence says the apostle, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Those who hope in Christ are joint-heirs with Christ to all the holiness and happiness in the universe. He is heir of all things, and they are joint-heirs with him to all things. Accordingly the apostle says to the Colossians, "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." If Christ shall appear in glory, then believers shall appear in glory. If Christ shall inherit all things, then believers shall inherit all things. If Christ shall possess and enjoy all the holiness and happiness which he shall eventually promote, by all he has done, and shall do in the works of creation, providence and redemption; then believers shall possess and enjoy all the holiness and happiness, that shall be possessed and enjoyed in heaven to all eternity. And if Christ cannot be disappointed in his hope of the joy set before him while dying on the cross; then believers cannot be disappointed in any of the hopes they have placed in Him, who is now seated, and will be forever seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The hopes of Christians, therefore, are unspeakably great and absolutely certain. And while they live upon these hopes, they are far happier than other men in this life, whose hopes are always uncertain, and at best very short-lived. It is true, indeed, the men of the world have hopes, and live upon their hopes, and often imagine that they are far more happy than Christians. But the happiness which believers derive from their hopes in Christ, is far more pure, permanent and satisfactory, than the happiness which the men of the world can ever derive from their highest worldly hopes. The piety of Christians is inseparably connected with the promises of the gospel, which afford them a source of happiness to which sinners are total strangers. Ask a Christian whether he would give up his hopes in the promises of the gospel, and he would

readily answer he would not give them up for the whole world. They, therefore, enjoy a greater happiness in this life, than any sinner could enjoy, if he could gain the whole world. But Christians, with all their sufferings and sorrows, are the happiest men in this life. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." None can embrace the gospel too soon, if they wish to be the most happy in this life, as well as in the life to come. But,

2. If real Christians had no hopes of a future and blessed immortality beyond the grave, which the gospel promises, they would not be the most happy men in this life. Though they possess true virtue, or real holiness, yet this virtue or holiness would lessen rather than increase their happiness in this present evil world, if it were wholly unconnected with any hope in the promises of the gospel. If some of the heathen should have their hearts changed, and exercise true virtue or real holiness, without the light of the gospel, and without the knowledge of any future state, or any future happiness beyond the grave, there is no reason to think that their mere virtue would render them more happy than the other heathen among whom they lived. Though true virtue has a natural tendency to promote the happiness of those who exercise it; yet this tendency may be obstructed, weakened, or destroyed. Though Christ was perfectly virtuous or holy in the garden, and on the cross, yet his virtue or holiness did not free him from the pains and agonies of crucifixion. Though the primitive Christians habitually lived in the exercise of vital piety or true virtue, yet their vital piety or true virtue would not have supported them under their fiery trials, persecutions, and martyrdom, if they had been destitute of all hope in Christ, and of all expectation of inheriting the promises of the gospel in a future and eternal state. If men could have what is called *natural* religion, which is supposed to consist in true virtue, it would not make them happy; for natural religion has no promises of a future state, or of future happiness beyond the grave. Suppose that deists, infidels, and some who call themselves Christians, do possess what they call natural religion or true virtue; it can afford them hope in this life only; and, consequently, must naturally tend to plunge them in darkness and despair.

Those who think and speak so highly of natural religion, maintain the opinion that true virtue is its own reward, without any hope in Christ or the promises of the gospel. Accordingly they suppose the heathen may be saved without the gospel, on the ground of their moral virtue; and that those who deny or disbelieve the gospel may be saved, on account of their

virtue or good deeds. But this opinion is contrary to the whole design, and to all the promises, of the gospel. To strip the gospel of all its promises in Christ, is to sink it down to the level of mere natural religion; which is really to pervert and destroy it. Indeed, many consider natural and revealed religion as essentially the same; and represent Christianity as a mere appendage to natural religion, which will save all who sincerely believe it, as well as the gospel. This is a doctrine perfectly agreeable to the natural heart; and multitudes embrace it, while they remain enemies to the cross of Christ, and all the fundamental duties and doctrines of the gospel. Those who believe that virtue is its own reward, and trust in themselves that they are virtuous and righteous, have hope in themselves, and not in Christ, and make light of all the promises and threatenings of the gospel. Strip the gospel of all its promises and threatenings, and it contains nothing to be loved or feared. There is not a greater and more dangerous error in the Christian world at this day, than substituting Natural religion in the room of Christianity, or the religion of the gospel. This error Mr. Addison, Bishop Hoadly, and other celebrated Episcopalians, have maintained; and it is still maintained by Episcopalians, Methodists, nominal Calvinists, Unitarians, and respectable Deists, Universalists, and Infidels. But such men can have hope in this life only. For no religion that ever has been, or can be devised, can carry the hopes of men a step beyond the grave. It is Christianity alone that has brought life and immortality to light. Aside from the principles and promises of the gospel, it is impossible to prove that death is not an eternal sleep: and that all who have died have not perished.

3. If all that men do know or can know in this world, about another world, they must be indebted to the gospel for; then all that Deists pretend to know about the immortality of the soul and future happiness, they have derived from the light of the gospel. Lord Herbert, the first and principal propagator of Deism in England, formed a system of what he called Natural religion, in distinction from Christianity, which was really a system of pure Deism or Infidelity. He maintained that, if men would worship God, and practice the duties of morality, and shun the paths of vice, they should be forever happy in a future state. But all that he said upon these subjects, that had the least appearance of reason and plausibility, he had learned from the gospel. Had not the gospel revealed a future state, he would never have discovered it by the mere light of nature; and had not the gospel given him information about the human soul, and its condition after death, he could not

have known any more about its existence and condition after death, than an ignorant Hottentot. This more modern Deists have been convinced of; for they have denied a future state, and the future existence of the soul, and believed death to be an eternal sleep. And, on this account, they are called mortal Deists, in distinction from immortal Deists, who formerly held to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and a future state. It is astonishing that any men, and especially learned men, under the gospel, should renounce the light of the gospel for the darkness of Deism. Every man, who reasons correctly and consistently from the bare light of nature, must clearly see that he can have no ground of hope beyond the grave, if he rejects the promises of the gospel. Whoever pretends to know anything about a future state, but what he has learned from the gospel, is either deceived himself, or designs to deceive others. Such persons, therefore, are to be disbelieved, disregarded, and studiously avoided.

4. If true believers build all their hopes of future and eternal happiness upon the truths and promises of the Bible, then it is of great importance for them to read and study the scriptures daily. They unfold the great scheme of redemption through the death and mediation of Christ, and discover the invisible scenes and objects of eternity, which are the only source of their future and everlasting happiness. If Christians neglect to read the Bible from day to day, they will find their hopes and graces will languish, and their hearts and hopes more and more placed upon the world and the things of the world. They should not be satisfied with barely hearing the Bible read, but read it seriously and attentively to themselves, that they may understand, and love, and confide in the precious promises of God. David prized the word of God above gold, yea, above fine gold. It was his meditation all the day. And there is not a better evidence that any Christians are growing in grace, and enjoy the great consolations of the gospel, than their constant, uniform practice of daily and frequently reading the holy scriptures. And on the other hand, there is scarcely a darker sign that professors are declining in religion, than their reluctance to, and neglect of reading the Word of God. Christians should never substitute the reading of any other book or books, in the place of the reading of the Bible. No other book gives such just, clear and impressive ideas of God, of Christ, of things present and of things to come, as the sacred scriptures. And this is an important reason why both saints and sinners should never despise or neglect the Word of God for the sake of reading anything else. But are not even

Christians in great danger of being guilty of this neglect, while there are so many useless, and worse than useless publications at this day, to attract their attention, and divert it from the only infallible guide to duty, and to present and future happiness?

5. If the gospel affords those, who cordially embrace it, a just ground to hope for future and eternal happiness, then it affords as sure and certain ground of eternal despair to those who reject it. This appears from the very design of the gospel; which is, to promote the future and eternal happiness of all who place their hope and confidence in Christ. For it cannot promote the happiness of both believers and unbelievers; since the objects it exhibits to make believers happy, directly tend to make unbelievers miserable. But the gospel itself expressly declares, that it shall be a savor of life unto life to those who believe and embrace it; and, at the same time, as expressly declares, that it shall be a savor of death unto death to all who disbelieve and reject it. The gospel contains as many and as plain threatenings of eternal death to unbelievers, as it does promises of eternal life to believers. As it expressly declares that he who believeth shall be saved; so it as expressly declares that he who believeth not shall be damned. According to scripture, the hopes of Christians are growing stronger, and the hopes of sinners are growing weaker and weaker. The hopes of believers strengthen and increase, as they become more and more acquainted with the gospel; but the hopes of sinners decrease and languish, as they become more and more acquainted with the gospel; so that the righteous have hope, but sinners are driven away in despair. It is strange, indeed, that any unbeliever can expect that the gospel they reject can save them. They are certainly under a strong delusion, which exposes them to a great and eternal disappointment.

6. It appears from what has been said, that those are in a peculiarly dangerous situation who are building their temporal or eternal hopes on any other foundation than the gospel of Christ. There can be no doubt but that many are building their temporal hopes upon objects that will certainly disappoint them at last. For they live without God, without Christ, and without hope in him. And every other ground of hope must fail them when they come to leave the world, and may before. There can be no doubt, also, that some are building their hopes upon their own virtue and goodness, which the gospel forbids them to build upon, and which must eventually disappoint them. Christ has let such know how he will treat them, by his conduct towards the man without a wedding garment.

Will you now, my hearers, be so good as to ask yourselves whether your hopes are in Christ, or in yourselves, or in the world. If your hopes are in Christ, you have renounced all other grounds of hope. If your hopes are in yourselves, they cannot be in Christ. Or if your hopes are in the world, you must perish as Dives did, and the rich man that laid up goods for many years. The gospel is in your hands, and you must embrace or reject it. And it must save or destroy you. The kingdom is brought near you, and it is at your peril to refuse to enter in.

SERMON XXXVIII.

SINS OF IGNORANCE.

"SPEAK unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord—."—Lev. iv. 2.

IF this be a just supposition, then we may justly draw this conclusion from it:

That men *may* sin through ignorance.

I shall first show that men may sin through ignorance; and then show how this may come to pass.

I. "If a soul sin through ignorance;" this carries the idea that the thing supposed may take place, or that men may actually sin through ignorance. This will appear if we consider,

1. That God appointed particular sacrifices to be offered for the sin of ignorance. This institution immediately follows the text. In this chapter, God requires the priest, if he sin through ignorance, to bring a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord, for a sin-offering. Or if the whole congregation sin through ignorance, he requires them to bring a sin-offering. Or if a ruler sin through ignorance, he requires him to bring a sin-offering. Or if one of the common people sin through ignorance, he requires him to bring a sin-offering. The appointment of sin-offerings to such various characters, is a clear evidence that persons of all characters might be guilty of the sin of ignorance. Besides,

2. The scripture gives us an account not only of some sins, but of very great sins, which were committed through ignorance. Those who crucified our blessed Saviour, were in the time of it, ignorant of their criminality and guilt. So the apostle represents them. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have

crucified the Lord of glory." And Christ considered their conduct in this light, when he hung expiring on the cross. He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The Jews thought they were crucifying a vile impostor, while, with wicked hands and hearts, they were actually crucifying the Lord of glory. Paul ignorantly persecuted Christ and his followers. He solemnly declared, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And speaking of himself as a blasphemer, and persecutor, and injurious, he said, "But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Christ foretold this conduct of Paul and of other persecutors. Speaking to his disciples, he said, "They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me." This prediction has been often fulfilled. There is reason to believe that some of the most cruel persecutors in every age of the Church, have verily thought they were doing God service, while imbruing their hands in the blood of the most faithful followers of Christ. Now if both Jews and Gentiles, and professed Christians have from age to age been guilty of such numerous and atrocious sins of ignorance, there can be no doubt but men may still sin through ignorance. This leads me to show,

II. How it may come to pass, that men may sin through ignorance. There seems to be a difficulty. For both reason and scripture tell us that ignorance excuses men for doing things which are injurious to themselves and others. Upon this ground, God appointed several cities of refuge in Israel, where men might flee and abide, if they had killed any through ignorance. Their ignorance was to be a complete excuse and security. And we know now, that if one man kills another through ignorance, his ignorance will excuse him before the most solemn tribunal on earth. If the man accused of murder can make it appear, that he killed the person through total ignorance, without malice prepense, he will be acquitted as innocent. But how can ignorance excuse at one time, and not at another? The answer is easy. There are two kinds of ignorance. *Involuntary* ignorance always excuses; but *voluntary* ignorance never excuses. The cities of refuge were provided for such as injured or killed a person through involuntary ignorance. This is plain from the account given in the twenty-first chapter of Exodus. "He that smiteth a man so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not

in wait, but God delivereth him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee." The design of the city of refuge is more fully explained in the nineteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. "And this is the case of the slayer which shall flee thither, that he may live; whoso killeth his neighbor *ignorantly*, whom he hated not in time past; as when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbor to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbor that he die, he shall flee unto one of these cities and live." This case clearly illustrates the nature of *involuntary and unavoidable ignorance*, which totally excuses any action which flows from it. Having premised the distinction between voluntary and involuntary ignorance, I proceed to show how men may sin through *voluntary* ignorance. And here I would observe,

1. That men may sin ignorantly, by not attending to what is their present duty. If men act without considering whether they ought, or ought not to act, they may act wrong without knowing it. This we have reason to believe is the case in ten thousand instances. How often do we act without putting the question to ourselves, whether duty requires or forbids us to act! In such circumstances, we may sin by acting, or not acting. The most deliberate and conscientious persons too often act, or refrain from acting, without perceptibly attending to what conscience dictates in the case. As to the young and inconsiderate part of mankind, they habitually act without the least attention to duty. And indeed, good men seldom put the question to themselves, whether they ought, or ought not to act, or how they ought to act, except in some very important, difficult and doubtful cases. In such cases, they can remember they put the question respecting duty, and how they answered it, when they acted or refused to act. But in common cases, where no doubt lay upon their mind, and where they were governed by immediate intuition, they can rarely recollect why they did, or did not act; or what motive governed their conduct. All they can say is, that they have no remembrance of counteracting any dictate of scripture, or conscience. It is easy to see, therefore, how men may sin through ignorance, by not considering what their duty is. They may do wrong without knowing they do wrong in the time of it, and what they would not have done, if they had only attended to the dictates of conscience. Had they only put the question whether they ought, or ought not to act, they would have heard the voice of conscience which always speaks, and would have

done their duty. Many such sins of ignorance are undoubtedly committed by mere inadvertency, which is itself sinful.

2. Men may commit sins of ignorance by acting, or not acting according to a false rule of duty. Men are so fond of appearing to themselves and to others to act consistently, that they are very apt to set up false rules of duty in order to justify their conduct. There is not a man in the world but loves to do what he calls his duty, and dreads to act contrary to it. For this reason sinful men have sought out many inventions to indulge and gratify the corruption of their hearts, consistently with some rule of duty. Conscience and scripture are in truth the only infallible rules of duty; but these are not favorable to the depraved and corrupt principles of human nature, and on that account, are often set aside, and other rules of duty substituted in their room. By this substitution of false rules of duty, a door is opened for the commission of innumerable sins of ignorance.

Here I may say in particular, that *tradition* is a false rule of duty, which is often substituted in the place of conscience and scripture. The Jews often did this, for which Christ openly and sharply condemned them. Whatever was said of old time, they regarded as sacred, and sufficient to justify their conduct. By thus adopting the traditions of men, they made void the commandments of God, which were infallible rules of duty. And by acting agreeably to such traditions they sinned grossly, while they really thought they were doing their duty in the sight of God. They would injure and abuse their kind and aged parents, and plead tradition in excuse. They would indulge their selfish affections, and justify themselves in hating their enemies, by the same rule. Nor has tradition lost all its influence with mankind. How many feel entirely satisfied with their conduct, if it be supported only by this authority!

Example is another false rule of duty, which is often followed in preference to conscience and the word of God. Many seem to think that they may follow the example of those whom they love and esteem. Subjects are apt to follow the example of their rulers and teachers. The people in Christ's day asked, "Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?" in order to determine whether it was their duty to believe on him. Almost every man looks up to some other as a rule or pattern to follow. Example has a powerful and imperceptible tendency to lead men into the sins of ignorance, while they imagine they are actually doing their duty.

There is a still more absurd principle, which some are ready

to adopt as the rule of duty; and that is, to *do to others, as others do to them.* Though few would be willing to allow this to be a universal rule of duty; yet many do make it a rule of right to themselves, and inwardly justify their conduct by it. But this and all other false rules of duty directly tend to make men imagine they are doing their duty, while they are grossly violating the divine commands and gratifying the corruptions of their own hearts.

3. Men may sin ignorantly, by applying the right rule of duty to their external conduct merely. They are extremely apt when they consult conscience, or scripture, in order to learn their duty, to consult the one or the other, or both these rules, with respect to their mere outward actions. They want to know whether such and such external actions are agreeable to the rule of duty, leaving the heart or internal motive of conduct out of the inquiry; and if they find they have not externally violated any divine precept, or prohibition, they conclude they are innocent. This was the practice of the Jews, who considered the divine commands as a rule of their external conduct only; and if they found they had not externally disobeyed any divine law, they felt entirely guiltless. The Pharisee that went up to the temple to pray, completely justified himself, because he had not externally transgressed, but externally obeyed the divine commands. He had no sin to confess; he had only to thank God for his restraining grace. The young man in the gospel was confident he had kept all the commandments of God, because, he had not externally broken them. Upon the same ground Paul himself could confidently say, that "as touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was entirely blameless." The Pharisees judged of their characters by their mere external conduct; and finding they had externally done those things which the moral and ceremonial law required, they supposed they were absolutely blameless, and free from sin. Their mistake lay in applying a good rule to but a part, and the least essential part of their actions. Mankind still run into the same mistake. They inquire only whether their external conduct be conformable to the precepts and prohibitions of the Bible. In this way they may and do commit innumerable sins, and persuade themselves that they have done their whole duty. The merely moral man judges of himself in this manner. He asks himself, Does the Bible require me to labor six days in the week? Then I have done my duty, for I have labored so. Does God require me to read his Word every day? Then I have done my duty, for I read it every day. Does the Bible require me to pray every day? Then I have done my

duty, for this is my daily practice. Does the Bible require me to attend public worship every Sabbath? Then I have done my duty, for I have uniformly attended it every Sabbath. Is it not plain that this moral man applies an infallible rule of duty to his external conduct only, and leaves the heart, which alone constitutes the essence of duty, entirely out of his account of right and wrong, holiness and sin, and so deceives himself by applying a good rule of duty to what is really no duty? Not only moral men, but immoral men, and even good men, may deceive themselves in the same way. Bad men do a great many things which God requires them to do; but their depraved hearts turn all their external actions into sin. Good men may obey God externally, while they disobey him internally. There is no one way, perhaps, in which men are led to commit sins of ignorance so often, as by comparing their external conduct, instead of their hearts, with the Word of God. I may add,

4. Men may sin ignorantly, by applying a true rule of duty with partiality to themselves. They may apply the rule both to their hearts and external conduct, and yet hold it with a wavering or partial hand. They may be unwilling to know what the rule of duty requires and forbids; and by applying it in this partial manner, they may make the rule speak what it would not speak, if they had a clear, full, impartial view of it. For instance, a man attempts to know whether it is duty to do an act of self-denial in a certain case, and he consults his conscience and his Bible to discover his duty. But he is so selfish, that he represents the case in such a partial and false light, that both conscience and scripture tell him not to do what both would tell him to do, if he stated the case plainly and impartially. Or suppose a man attempts to examine the state of his own mind, and to discover whether he be really a friend or enemy to God. He may apply the scripture rules of trial with partiality in his own favor, and of consequence establish his hope by the very rules which would have destroyed it, had he been impartial in their application to his own case. Now if men may thus misapply the rules of duty, it is plain that they may commit sin, while they are confident they are following the infallible rules of duty. Thus it appears that men may commit sins of ignorance, by not attending to any rule of duty, by following a false rule of duty, by applying a proper rule of duty to their external conduct only, and by applying it to their hearts as well as external conduct with a partiality in their own favor.

I will conclude with one Reflection.

We are all apt to misjudge, when we blame errorists for propagating their sentiments. They verily think their errors are truths, and very important truths. Why then is it not their duty, and an important duty, to take every proper method, and employ all proper means to enlighten the minds of others, by conversing upon them, publishing them, and using the most persuasive arguments to induce them to embrace what they believe important, salutary truths? Though some errorists may be insincere in professing errors, yet it would be uncandid to suppose that they are all insincere. Indeed, there is good ground to believe that some, if not many of them are sincere in the false sentiments they profess and endeavor to propagate. Some Arminians are undoubtedly sincere in their peculiar anti-scriptural opinions. So are Antinomians, Methodists, Unitarians and Universalists. Why then are they to be blamed for being active and zealous in their attempts to bring others over to their way of thinking on confessedly important subjects? They act according to their knowledge, and who should not act according to their knowledge? We know, however, the Bible condemns all errorists, and requires us to condemn and avoid them, lest they should corrupt us. They must, therefore, be guilty of some sin; but of what sin? Their sin does not consist in propagating errors which they believe to be important truths. What then is the sin they are guilty of? This subject tells us that they are guilty of the sin of ignorance, in embracing their errors, and not in propagating them when they verily believe them to be truths. No man ever embraced a religious error as an error, but as a truth. His error, therefore, is the effect of ignorance, that is, *voluntary* ignorance, which is always a chosen sin. Errorists first love error better than truth, and then endeavor to prove that the errors they embrace are real truths. A young preacher of my former acquaintance, has since become a Roman Catholic. Do I blame him? I do; but for what? for loving and choosing error rather than truth. His sin of ignorance is a voluntary sin; and so is every other sin of ignorance. Errorists always love the errors they embrace. And their sin as errorists consists in their loving and choosing errors, when they might have known better if they had not chosen to be ignorant. This is the prophet's description of idolaters. "He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have *chosen* their own ways, and their soul *delighteth* in their abominations." All idolaters, errorists, and heretics are guilty of the

sin of voluntary ignorance, and ought to be blamed and avoided. Their sincerity is no excuse for their embracing errors, though it may be a good excuse for propagating them. I wish to propagate my own sentiments which I believe to be true, in every proper way. And every man ought to propagate his own sentiments which he believes to be true, in every proper way. But I am guilty of the sin of ignorance, if I have embraced any religious sentiments which are not true; and so is every man guilty of the sin of ignorance, if he has embraced any religious sentiments which are not true. No man has a right to embrace error instead of truth. But we are apt to censure errorists for what they are not guilty of, instead of that for which they are guilty. After they have embraced errors, and sincerely believed them to be truths, they are not to blame for propagating them. They are only chargeable with their first sin in embracing them, and for refusing to be convinced, if proper means and arguments have been used to discover their errors. We have a right to blame men for their sins of ignorance, because they are voluntary in committing them. But we ought to place their sin in what it consists, and not in what it does not consist. No man is to be blamed for acting agreeable to the errors he really believes to be truths; but he is to be blamed for loving and embracing his errors. Carelessness may be a sin of ignorance; forgetfulness may be a sin of ignorance; and we often blame children and others for carelessness and forgetfulness; and the reason is, their carelessness and forgetfulness is owing to their attending to improper things. And all sins of ignorance are owing to loving and attending to things which ought not to be loved and attended to.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If there be no sins of ignorance but what are voluntary, then men are never under a natural necessity of sinning. Involuntary ignorance totally excuses. For if men act up to the knowledge they have, or may have of duty, with a good heart, they do their duty in the sight of God. But whenever men voluntarily neglect to *know* their duty, they act under the influence of voluntary ignorance; they act wrong, and their ignorance does not excuse them. Their ignorance arises from their voluntarily neglecting to consult the rule of duty, or from consulting some false rule of duty, or from misapplying the rule of duty, or from applying it with partiality. Conscience or scripture will always inform a man what his present duty is,

if he will only consult one or both properly. Of course he, is never obliged to act wrong through his ignorance of duty. It is absurd to suppose that God ever places a man in a state in which he cannot know his duty, and then condemns him for not doing it. A child seven years old may know his duty; a pagan may know his duty; a Jew may know his duty; a papist may know his duty; the best or worst man in the world may know his duty. A child, a pagan, a Jew, a papist, and every other person has a conscience which dictates what is right and what is wrong. The conscience of a child tells him he ought to obey his parents. The conscience of a heathen tells him he ought to love his fellow-men as himself, and worship him whom he believes to be his Creator. The conscience of a Jew tells him he ought to read the Old Testament, which he believes is the word of God, and to do what God therein requires. The conscience of a papist tells him he ought to worship the only living and true God. And the conscience of every man tells him he ought to obey its dictates, and whatever the Bible enjoins upon him. If any person is ignorant of his duty, it is owing to his voluntary ignorance, which never excuses. Whenever men are in doubt what their duty is, it is only for them to consult conscience and the Bible, and they may always know it, if they are willing to know it. If they either neglect to consult the true rule of duty, or consult a false rule of duty, or the true rule of duty with partiality, they deceive themselves, and their deception is voluntary and criminal. Our Saviour, in one of his discourses to the people, demanded, "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" And again he said, "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." Here Christ makes a distinction between sins of knowledge and sins of ignorance, and represents both as deserving of punishment. And this is agreeable to the dictates of every man's conscience, because voluntary ignorance does not excuse, though it may palliate. Men may do things which are not expressly required, nor expressly forbidden in the Bible; but if they do not act agreeably to the dictates of conscience, they commit either sins of knowledge, or sins of ignorance, for which they deserve to be punished. They know, or might know, in all such cases, what their duty is, and are inexcusable if they neglect it.

2. What has been said concerning sins of ignorance, shows how men may live in stupidity and ease, notwithstanding

they are pursuing a constant course of sinning. To a mind awake to duty, to God, and to eternity, it must appear strange that men can be easy and unconcerned while in the bonds of iniquity, under a sentence of eternal death, and every day liable to lie down in endless sorrow. But so it is. Sinners in this situation can live very easy, if not happy. This subject will account for it. It is because their sins are chiefly sins of ignorance, which in their view are no sins at all, and give them no sense of guilt or danger. They feel very innocent and whole, and why should they feel any anxiety or concern about themselves? Paul lived many years in the constant course of sinning, without the least remorse, and thought he was entirely innocent and blameless. The reason was, his sins, though extremely great, were sins of ignorance. He verily thought he was doing his duty, while persecuting Christ and his followers. The Pharisees in general lived habitually in the sins of ignorance, and thought themselves righteous, and despised others. While the young man in the gospel was living in the state of nature, and in an uninterrupted course of disobedience to the law of love, he thought he had obeyed all the divine commands, and maintained a life of innocence. Nothing can account for the conduct, views, and feelings of these persons, but their voluntary ignorance of their duty. They applied the divine law, which was the infallible rule of duty, to their external conduct only, without the least regard to the heart. This led them to live in a constant course of sinning, without the least sense of guilt and danger. And are there not multitudes living in the same manner at the present day? How many who are entirely destitute of the love of God, live from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year, in great ease and security, while they do nothing but sin? Though their sins are more than can be reckoned up, yet they are sins of ignorance, and in their view no sins at all. How many sinners are here present, who, in their own view, have done their duty the last week, and have nothing to reproach themselves for? They have injured no man. They have not taken the name of God in vain. They have every day pursued their proper business with activity and diligence: and what more could they have done? They might and ought to have done a great deal more. They ought to have aimed at the glory of God in all they did. They ought to have loved God supremely, and sought to promote his interest more than their own. They ought to have kept their hearts with all diligence, and gratefully acknowledged God for his favors, and submitted to his will in their daily trials. These things, in which all duty con-

sists, they have left undone; and every imagination of the thoughts of their heart has been evil and only evil, and displeasing to God. They have done nothing but sin the week past, and every week they have lived in the world. And nothing but their ignorance of their own hearts has given them any ease and security. They stand chargeable with all their sins of ignorance, which they will discover sooner or later, and feel them to be a burden too heavy to bear. Hence,

3. We learn from what has been said, why awakened sinners are often so deeply affected and bowed down under a sense of guilt. It is because God sets not only their sins of knowledge, but their sins of ignorance, which are often the greatest, and always the most numerous, in order before them. He brings the law of love home to their conscience, and makes them realize that their corrupt hearts have been a constant and uninterrupted transgression of it, and turned all their supposed good desires, good designs, and good deeds into sin. When the divine law came to the conscience of Paul, it produced such painful and distressing effects. He says, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." The law discovered his sins of knowledge and his sins of ignorance in a clear and new light. The law discovered his total selfishness, his pharisaical righteousness, and persecuting spirit, which struck all his high and false hopes of heaven entirely dead. His sins appeared so great, so numerous, and so aggravated, that he thought himself the chief of sinners, and most deserving of eternal death, the proper wages of sin. He was astonished that he had ever thought he was blameless, and had done God service by opposing Christ, and breathing out threatenings and slaughter against his pious and harmless disciples. Into such deep distress and anguish of heart, God often throws sinners under awakenings and convictions, and especially moral sinners, who are guilty of the greatest and most numerous sins of ignorance. The sins of the profligate are chiefly sins of knowledge; but the sins of the moral are chiefly sins of ignorance, and such as they are ready to imagine are obedience to, rather than a transgression of, the divine law. Profligate sinners are commonly first convinced of the wickedness of their lives; but moral sinners are commonly first convinced of the wickedness of their hearts. But both are pressed down under genuine convictions, by an insupportable load of guilt. The divine law constrains them to set aside every false rule of duty, and causes them to see that their hearts are full of evil, and fully set in them to do evil, and that they are bound over to destruction by the cords

of their iniquity. This fills them with despair of saving themselves. They realize they must perish, unless the sovereign and unpromised grace of God interpose for their relief. Into such a state of guilt and distress, sinners under the first preaching of the gospel and effusion of the Holy Spirit were thrown; and the awakening and convincing influences of the Spirit still produce similar effects on the minds of sinners at this day. The prediction of the Prophet has been, and shall be fufilled when God appears to plead his own cause. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

4. This subject shows why those who have experienced a change of heart, often have a much clearer and more impressive sense of their sinfulness, than they had before they were renewed. This is no uncommon case with respect to young converts, which not unfrequently sinks them in spiritual darkness, and leads them to call their new hopes in question. They hardly dare to think they have passed from death to life, when they find so much moral corruption remaining in their hearts, and deadening the warm feelings and bright prospects they have had. But this may be easily accounted for. Their voluntary ignorance of their own hearts is in some measure removed. They see more clearly the internal exercises of their hearts, and feel more concerned to love and obey God in spirit and truth, than they did before their spiritual ignorance was taken away. Though they see less imperfection in their external conduct, yet they see more imperfection in their internal exercises. They find that the divine law is exceeding broad, and reaches the inmost recesses of their hearts. They find that the world and the things of the world very easily draw off their attention and affections from God and duty, and prevent their living as they know they ought to live, and desire to live, and expected they should live. They find many exercises of their hearts to be sinful, which they once thought were innocent. They find that they have done wrong, when they thought they had done right; that they have felt wrong, when they thought they had felt right; that they have served themselves, when they thought they had served God; and that they have been insincere, when they thought they had been sincere in their religious devotions. They find that notwithstanding they have resolved to make the law of God the rule of their conduct, they are extremely apt to lean to their own understanding, and trust in their own hearts; and that the more they exercise themselves to keep a conscience void of offence toward God and man, the more they discover their sins of ignorance and short-

comings in duty, which gives them an increasing sense of their great vileness and ill-desert in the sight of God; and sometimes leads them to doubt whether they have ever experienced a saving change.

5. This subject teaches Christians that they are in great danger of falling into spiritual declension. Christians generally begin to run well, but are very apt sooner or later to slacken their pace, and become stationary, if not retrograde in their Christian course. This was the case in all the primitive churches of Christ, but more especially in the seven churches of Asia. Christ complains of the church of Ephesus, "because they had left their first love." He complains of the church of Pergamos, because they had been too indulgent and lax in their duty towards heretics. And he reproves the church of Laodicea for their spiritual coldness and indifference in their spiritual concerns. The best of churches have too often fallen into degeneracy in respect to their faith or practice, or both; and it has commonly been owing to the same cause, the sins of ignorance. These are sins which easily and imperceptibly beset Christians. They degenerate very gradually. They fall into one sin of ignorance, which naturally leads to another sin of ignorance, and that to another and another, till they very insensibly become involved in deep declension. Conformity to the world is generally the first sin of ignorance, and that which leads them into almost all other sins of ignorance. Their duty requires them to be more or less concerned with the things of the world, and the men of the world, who possess a spirit which the apostle James says "is enmity with God." All Christians, while pursuing their necessary worldly concerns, are always exposed to imbibe this worldly spirit, which insensibly disposes them to conform to the world. The men of the world often pursue their secular concerns with propriety and discretion, and are worthy of imitation. But many of their customs and manners which are highly pleasing to them, are an abomination in the sight of God.

These customs and manners, however, they persuade themselves and others are very innocent and harmless, and Christians who neglect to keep themselves in the love of God, are very apt to form the same opinion and follow the multitude to do evil. They conform to the men of the world in one point, and then in another, and know not when and where to stop. One professor pays less and less regard to the Bible; another becomes less and less constant in family duties; another is more and more negligent in attending public worship; and another becomes less and less strict in keeping the Sabbath,

and refraining from laboring, visiting and travelling on this day. Others become less and less cautious of associating with the ungodly and erroneous, of visiting places of public resort, of joining in vain and corrupt conversation, and of uniting with those who pursue lying vanities and sinful amusements. These sins of ignorance easily beset Christians and insensibly alienate their affections from God, and gradually bring on stupidity, formality, and declension in religion. Declension in religion always begins with the sins of ignorance. No sincere professor at first intends to decline, but desires and intends to persevere and grow in grace. He shuns the company and conversation of the openly vicious, lest they should lead him astray from the path of duty: but apprehends no danger from the better sort of sinners, who profess to approve of religion in others, while they are mortal enemies to vital piety, and to all who profess it. These are the men with whom Christians are the most intimate, and from whom they are in the most danger. They pretend to be friendly to religion, and to those who profess it. They express no desire or design to draw Christians into any disreputable mode of living, conversing, or acting, they only wish them to conform to the reputable and innocent customs and manners of the world, and become like themselves worldly-minded. This they know will destroy the visible distinction between saints and sinners, professors and non-professors; and when this wall of partition is broken down, there is nothing to prevent professors from going all lengths with the men of the world. If these observations are just, they must be confirmed by experience and observation. And I now ask, whether they are not thus confirmed? I ask prayerless professors, if there be any, how they came to cast off fear and restrain prayer before God? Did not the sin of ignorance first lead you to conform to the world, and then to neglect your duty? I ask unfaithful professors, if there be any, how they came to neglect family government and instruction, and suffer their children and households to walk in the ways of their heart and sight of their eyes without restraint? Did not the sin of ignorance first lead you to conform to the world, and then to neglect your duty? And are you not still under the blinding influence of the sins of ignorance? Let me now ask, what says observation upon this subject? There are certainly some pious, wise, judicious, impartial persons in this place; and if there be a declension of religion here, they must have observed it. And whenever and wherever they observed it, they would naturally inquire how it came to pass. I now ask for the result of their observation. Are they not convinced, that professors are declining; that

their declining is owing to their conforming to the world; and that their conforming to the world is owing to their sins of ignorance? This snare the world have been, and still are laying for them, and they are falling one after another into it, gradually and insensibly, notwithstanding Christ has expressly and solemnly warned them against it. He said to his disciples, "Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." Again he said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." And again he said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." After such solemn admonitions of Christ himself, must not Christians believe that they are in great danger of falling into spiritual declension, through the sins of ignorance, which have never failed to corrupt men of piety in every age of the world? Hence,

6. This subject calls upon all professors of religion to search their hearts, and endeavor to discover as far as possible their sins of ignorance. They are the descendants of their first father, and have covered from their own view their transgressions as Adam did by hiding their iniquities in their bosoms. They have been guilty of many more sins of ignorance, than of knowledge. These sins must all become sins of knowledge. God now knows them, and he designs that they shall know them now, but it may be very injurious, if not destructive, to know them hereafter. They have all been marked and registered by their own conscience, that faithful monitor, which has always resided in their own breasts. Let them seriously, critically, and impartially examine their own conscience, and that will tell them what they never knew, and what they have been very loth to know. It will disclose a multitude of transgressions which they ought to know, and confess penitently before God. This is the immediate and important duty of two classes of men in particular, who are building their hopes of salvation upon their sins of ignorance. One class are building their hopes upon good works or mere external obedience to the divine commands; and the other class are building their hopes upon their false love, repentance, and faith. They both have acted from mere selfish motives. They both have done nothing but disobey God, while they thought they obeyed him. They have both lived in the continual commission of the sins of ignorance, and they both must repent and become reconciled to God, or perish forever. Let every one adopt the language of the Psalmist. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

SERMON XXXIX.

SUCCESS OF MINISTERS BY THE POWER OF GOD.

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF REV. SAMUEL SPRING, D.D., OF NEWBURYPORT, MARCH 14TH, 1819.

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."—2 Cor. x. 4.

THE scripture represents mankind to be in a state of rebellion against God, who has determined to reduce them to terms of submission and reconciliation. Accordingly, he has commissioned and armed his ministers to go and attack them in the strong holds, in which they have fortified themselves. Paul and the other apostles were the first ministers, under the gospel, whom he sent forth armed in this spiritual warfare, and whom he crowned with signal success. This, therefore, they gratefully acknowledge was owing, not to their own bravery or dexterity in using their weapons, but to the nature of their weapons, and to the divine influence, which made them mighty and irresistible. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." Or as it follows, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

In treating upon the text, I shall,

I. Inquire what weapons the ministers of the gospel are armed with.

II. Show that they are adapted to pull down the strong holds of sinners. And,

III. Show that it is God, who makes them mighty to bow the hearts of his enemies to submission.

I. Let us inquire what weapons the ministers of the gospel are armed with.

Though the apostles had some arms, which were never given to their successors in the ministry; yet they had no carnal weapons. They were not the soldiers of any earthly potentate, nor engaged in any such war as nations wage against nations, by the sword and bayonet; and consequently had no occasion for carnal weapons. But as they were engaged in a spiritual warfare, they were amply supplied with spiritual arms. They were armed not only with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, but with the gifts of the Spirit. They were endued with supernatural gifts and miraculous powers. To one was given "the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge;" "to another the gifts of healing;" "to another the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues." These supernatural endowments were spiritual weapons, by which they were peculiarly enabled to carry on their spiritual warfare against a rebellious world, involved in pagan ignorance, superstition, and idolatry. But as the apostles had greater difficulties to surmount, than their successors in the ministry, the whole spiritual armor of the latter consists, in the girdle of truth, "the breast-plate of righteousness," "the shield of faith," "the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." It is, indeed, from the gospel they preach, that they are to draw all their spiritual weapons, to attack the strong holds of sinners; and they are forbidden to employ any others in their spiritual warfare. I now proceed to show,

II. That the spiritual weapons, which they may draw from the magazine of the gospel, are mighty, and perfectly adapted to pull down the strong holds of the enemies of God, and bring them to a cordial reconciliation and submission to their injured and offended Sovereign. Though the apostles had other arms; yet it was principally by means of the spirit and truths of the gospel, that they gained their signal victories over both Jews and Gentiles wherever they went. With these spiritual weapons, they silenced pagan priests, overturned pagan altars, and converted pagan orators, poets, and philosophers. They renounced all carnal weapons, and vain philosophy, and employed the plain and pungent truths of the gospel, in attacking and subduing the hard and obstinate hearts of sinners. It was with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, that Peter pierced and subdued the hearts of three thousand, on the day of Pentecost. And it was with the same spiritual weapons, that Paul attacked the Athenian philosophers, converted one of the Athenian judges, and made Felix tremble. But that the

gospel affords spiritual weapons that are mighty, to pull down the strong hold of sinners, will more fully appear, if we consider,

1. The gospel affords ministers the best weapons, to pull down the strong hold of carnal security. Sinners are continually fortifying themselves against danger, and are ready to imagine, that they are entirely safe in their strong hold. They say to themselves, "We shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts;" and "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling-places to all generations," and that they shall live forever, and not see corruption. They put far away the evil day, settle upon their lees, and say in their hearts, the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil. With such thoughts, they fortify their minds against the fear of danger, and feel themselves perfectly secure in their entrenchments. But the great and solemn truths of the gospel are mighty to pull down their strong holds, and destroy their refuges of lies. The gospel tells them, that they are serpents, a generation of vipers, and deserve the damnation of hell; that they are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth upon them; and that except they repent, they shall inevitably and eternally perish. These divine truths, properly pointed at their hearts and consciences, are mighty to pull down their strong hold of carnal security, to alarm their fears, to cause them to cry for mercy, and bring them to unreserved submission to the terms of reconciliation proposed in the gospel. The terrors of the Lord have, in ten thousand instances, proved irresistible to the most careless secure sinners, driven them from their entrenchments, and constrained them to flee from the wrath to come.

2. The gospel affords ministers the best weapons, to pull down the strong hold of self-righteous sinners. This strong hold is built of more solid materials, than the strong hold of carnal security; and those who build it, feel much more safe in their fortifications. The self-righteousness of some consists in their amiable dispositions, decent deportment, inoffensive conduct, and in their private and public virtues. They resemble the Pharisee, who went up to the temple to pray, and thanked God that he was better than other men. They resemble the scribes and Pharisees in general, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. And they resemble Paul before his conversion, who in respect to the law, viewed himself altogether blameless. But there are some of the self-righteous, who consider this fortification too weak, and therefore

build their strong hold upon what they deem a firmer foundation. They place no dependence upon their native goodness, and external virtues; but fortify themselves in the confident belief, that they have been awakened, convinced, and converted; though their carnal mind has never been slain, or their hard heart been taken away. There is reason to fear, that not a few under the light of the gospel build this castle, and feel themselves absolutely secure in it. But no strong hold of self-righteousness is impregnable. The gospel affords ministers weapons sufficiently pointed and powerful to demolish any self-righteous fortification. By describing the essential difference between true love and false, or between true holiness and self-righteousness, they may make the most self-righteous sinner feel, that except his righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, he shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. The experiment has been made. One single prohibition of the divine law carried conviction to the conscience of Paul, destroyed his self-righteous hope, and laid him prostrate and defenceless at the foot of divine Sovereignty. The divine law is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The command, "Thou shall not covet," thou shall not be selfish, is mighty to pull down the strongest hold, that a self-righteous sinner can build.

3. The gospel affords ministers the best weapons, to drive sinners from their strong hold of native depravity. They are indeed by nature children of wrath. Their hearts are completely depraved and desperately wicked. They are naturally opposed to God, and to all good. And this moral depravity which they call original sin, they plead as an excuse for all their impenitence, unbelief, and disobedience to the divine commands. While they continue in this strong hold of native depravity, they are stout-hearted, and vainly imagine, that they can repel all the spiritual weapons, that ministers can employ against them. But one single spiritual weapon is sufficiently mighty, to pull down their strong hold, and bury them in its ruins. Their depravity is their rebellion, and their rebellion is altogether groundless and criminal. They hate and rebel against God, without a cause, for which they deserve to die. God, therefore, has expressed his wrath against them, and solemnly declared, that "the wages of sin is death;" that "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them;" and that "he that believeth not shall be damned." "Now we know that what

things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." When this law comes home to the consciences of sinners, it puts them to silence, destroys their defence, and turns their excuse into self-reproach and self-condemnation and despair. It had this powerful and irresistible effect upon Paul. He frankly confesses, "when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death."

4. The gospel affords ministers the best weapons, to drive sinners from their strong hold of divine decrees. Though they are often reluctant to believe, that God has from the foundation of the world, foreordained whatsoever comes to pass; yet when they are constrained, from reason and scripture, to believe this doctrine, they often exert all their ingenuity to turn it into a strong hold against God. They vainly imagine that upon the ground of this doctrine, they can fairly reason away both their guilt and danger. They say, if God has decreed all things, then he has decreed all their actions, and they cannot help acting just as he has decreed that they should act; and consequently, they are neither praise or blame-worthy for anything they do. This is reasoning away all their guilt. And by another train of reasoning, they reason away all their danger. For there is no danger of God's punishing them for doing what he has decreed, and for what does not deserve punishment; and there is no danger of their being lost, if he has decreed to save them. When sinners have built this fortification, they feel strong and able to meet and repel any arguments drawn from reason; and they are often bold enough to contend with their Maker on this, which they deem solid ground. But the gospel afforded Paul a spiritual weapon sufficiently mighty, to reach and convince, or destroy sinners in this entrenchment. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharoah, Even for the same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt then say unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou

made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" Here is a passage of scripture mighty to confound the carnal reasonings; and pointed enough to pierce the seared conscience of any sinner, who has been fortifying himself upon the sandy ground of the doctrine of divine decrees.

5. The gospel affords ministers spiritual weapons, to pull down the strong hold, which they build upon the doctrine of divine agency in regeneration. This doctrine our Saviour plainly taught: he said, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." And again he said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." The same doctrine of special grace is everywhere taught both in the Old and New Testaments. But sinners both secretly and openly build one of their strongest fortifications upon this doctrine. They say, that they cannot regenerate themselves, but it belongs to God to regenerate them; and that they cannot love nor serve God acceptably, until he pleases to shed abroad his love in their hearts; and this completely justifies them in continuing enemies and rebels against God. It is easy for ministers to find spiritual weapons, which are mighty enough to pull down this strong hold that any sinner has built. The great and general command requires him to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength. His particular command requires him to make him a new heart and a new spirit. And every command in the Bible implicitly requires him to change his own heart. God knows, and the sinner will know, when his conscience does its office, that he must relinquish his strong hold, or perish in it.

6. The gospel supplies ministers with spiritual weapons, which are mighty enough to pull down the last strong hold which sinners build upon the terms of salvation. They say, that the terms of reconciliation which God proposes to them, are unreasonable and impracticable, whether he renews their hearts or not. They say, that he requires them to love him,

before they know that he loves them; and to submit to him, before they know that he will save them. These terms, they allege, are too hard and humiliating for any rational creatures to comply with; and therefore they must be excused and justified in refusing to perform them. This strong hold they are confident they can defend against any attacks or attempts to dislodge them from it. But there are spiritual weapons, which may be successfully employed to destroy their vain confidence, and compel them to surrender at discretion. God commands them to lay down their arms, renounce their hostility, and accept the punishment of their iniquity. He authoritatively declares, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them: *and all the people shall say, Amen.*" And he appeals to their consciences, "whether his ways are not equal; and whether their ways are not unequal." To these precepts and appeal they can give no satisfactory answer; but the authority of their consciences, when duly awakened and enlightened, will join with the authority of God, in requiring them to approve and accept the terms of salvation; and in condemning them for ever thinking hard and complaining of the gracious and condescending offers of the gospel. Thus the gospel supplies ministers with the most proper and powerful spiritual weapons, to pull down all the strong holds or fortifications that sinners ever have made, or can make, to justify and defend themselves in their unreasonable opposition and rebellion against God. But,

III. It is only through God that they succeed in attacking and pulling down the strong holds of sinners by their spiritual weapons. This appears to be true,

In the first place, from the acknowledgment of the best preachers of the gospel. Though Paul, speaking in the name of the apostles, seems to exult in the victories they had gained over the enemies of God; yet he at the same time, humbly ascribes their success to the blessing of God upon their exertions. For, says he, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds." Though the apostles were armed with the best spiritual weapons, and used them in the wisest and best manner; yet they could not terrify or disarm a single sinner, or drive him from his strong hold, without the special assistance and concurrence of God. This the apostle freely acknowledges; for he says, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." "Who then," says he again to the Corinthians, "is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the *Lord*

gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but *God gave the increase.* So then, neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but *God that giveth the increase.*" And the ministers of Christ since the apostles' days, have generally, and to a great degree, labored in vain, and spent their strength for naught. They have preached the gospel to thousands and thousands, who despised and rejected it. And they have found, by painful experience, that it is only through God that they can succeed, in any cases, to pull down the strong holds of sinners. In regard to their success, they are ready to adopt the language of God to the prophet, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." And this will further appear, if we consider,

In the second place, that nothing short of divine power can change the *hearts* of sinners. God claims it as his prerogative, to take away the stony heart, and give a heart of flesh; and to make men willing in the day of his power, to submit to the terms of reconciliation, which he has proposed in the gospel. Until God does exert his irresistible power in changing and subduing the hearts of sinners, neither men nor means can allure or drive them from their strong holds. Ministers may invite them, and even command them, in the name of the Lord, to renounce their hostility, and become reconciled to God. But they had rather die in opposing him, than to submit to his terms of reconciliation. Ministers have no sufficiency of themselves; but all their sufficiency is of God, who sometimes makes them able ministers of the New Testament, and crowns their labors with signal success. He can make their spiritual weapons, not only mighty, but effectual to pull down the strong holds of sinners, and cause the most stout-hearted to renounce their opposition and rebellion, and cordially return to God, from whom they had unreasonably revolted.

I now proceed to the improvement of the subject.

1. If all sinners build such strong holds, as have been mentioned; then they are all in a state of hostility against God. All their fortifications are so many evidences, that they are enemies and rebels against God, and mean to defend themselves against all whom he commissions, and arms, and sends, to reduce them to submission. Men never build castles, only in self-defence against those, whom they view as disposed to attack them. If sinners were the cordial friends of God, and the dutiful subjects of his government, they would have no apprehension of being attacked as rebels, nor any disposition to fortify themselves against an attack. It is true, they generally deny, that they are in a state of hostility against God. Some

seriously and deliberately affirm, that they never felt the least enmity or disaffection to God, but have always loved him, as their Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor. Some say, that though they are not friends, yet they are not enemies to God. They mean to be neutrals between God, and those who presume to despise his authority and disobey his commands. But who are the most engaged to build and strengthen their fortifications, and most obstinately determined to defend their strong holds, against all attacks? The open and avowed enemies of God build the fewest and weakest fortifications, and oftener yield and submit to the terms of reconciliation than those, who deny that they are enemies to God, or those who pretend to be neutrals. But the conduct of all sinners speaks louder than their pretensions, and proclaims them complete rebels against God. For, if they had no enmity to God, or the least love to him, they would gladly embrace the gospel, and accept the first offer of pardoning mercy. They would rejoice to hear, that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Those who deny, that sinners are totally depraved, and have a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and not subject to his law, neither indeed can be, cannot possibly account for the impenitence and unbelief of any sinners under the gospel. For it is absolutely certain, that if they had the least degree of holiness, or moral goodness, they would instantly and joyfully accept the terms of salvation, and never risk their eternal interests, upon any future and uncertain period. The delays of sinners, and their fortifications in defence of their delays, are instead of a thousand arguments, to prove to themselves and to the world, that they are in a state of irreconcilable hostility to God, and choose to perish in their strong holds, rather than submit to the gracious, and condescending terms of the gospel.

2. If sinners do build such strong holds as have been mentioned, for the very purpose of defending themselves in their rebellion against God; then we may be assured, that they never will submit to the terms of the gospel, until their castles are destroyed, and they are morally obliged to yield cordial and unconditional submission to God. How many hear the invitations, the commands, and the threatenings of the gospel, from Sabbath to Sabbath, from year to year, and for many years together, without the least apprehension of danger, and without the least thought of returning to God, and embracing his offers of mercy? How many, who are actually pierced and wounded by the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, use every

method to heal their wounded spirits, and fortify themselves more and more against all the solemn and weighty truths pointed at their hearts and consciences, till they become of all men the most hardened in rebellion, impenitence, and unbelief? And though some sinners may find a sense of danger and guilt increasing from day to day, and depriving them of all inward peace and comfort, or even throwing them into the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity; yet their stout hearts rise higher and higher in enmity to God and to all good, the more clearly and powerfully divine truths are poured into their minds, till they settle down in sullen and obstinate despair, and inwardly choose to die, rather than submit. The conduct of all these three classes of sinners, speaks the same language, that they resolve to defend themselves in their strong holds, as long as possible, or as long as they are not absolutely obliged, by moral necessity, to renounce their hostility and become reconciled to God. Some or all of these three classes of sinners are to be found in every religious society, and they always have been found in every religious society, where the gospel has been preached. So that the conduct of sinners under the gospel has demonstrated, that they all build their strong holds, and all determine to defend them, until God, by his special grace, changes their hearts, and makes them willing in the day of his power to exercise unconditional submission. It is a prevailing, but groundless opinion, that sinners grow better under the light and means of the gospel, and gradually become more and more disposed to embrace it. Or at least, it is generally supposed, that some sinners do, and especially those who are deeply impressed by the common influences of the divine Spirit. But if these sinners, as well as others, do always build their strong holds, and the more powerfully they are attacked, the more resolutely they defend them; then it is beyond a doubt, that they never will yield to the terms of the gospel, unless they are absolutely obliged to do it, by the irresistible power and grace of God.

3. If sinners do, as has been represented, build strong holds, to defend themselves in their rebellion against God; then they have no ground or right to plead, that they are so weak and impotent, that they cannot throw down their arms, and accept the offers of pardoning mercy. Whenever they are invited and commanded in the name of the Lord, to throw down their arms and renounce their hostility, and immediately become reconciled to their rightful and gracious Sovereign, upon pain of his everlasting displeasure; they immediately reply, that they have not sufficient power and ability to throw down their arms and

submit, till he assures them, that he has actually pardoned them, and intends to save them. They insist upon it, that they cannot submit unconditionally. But did any garrison ever plead, that they had not power enough to throw down their arms, and submit to the superior force of their enemies? The besieged sometimes plead, that they are forbidden to give up their fortress, or to submit to any terms. And they sometimes refuse to submit, because the terms proposed appear too hard and unreasonable to be complied with. But it is to be presumed, that no garrison, who had a discretionary right to give up their fortress to a superior force, upon reasonable terms, ever refused to do it, upon the pretence, that they had not power to lay down their arms, and give up their untenable post. Now, the terms of submission, which the gospel proposes to sinners in their strong holds, are as reasonable and low as possible; and they are not forbidden but commanded to comply with them. It is, therefore, extremely absurd as well as criminal in them, to refuse compliance, upon the pretence that they are not able to lay down their weapons of rebellion, cease hostilities, and comply with the gracious offers of salvation. It is not because they are unable to accept the terms of mercy proposed in the gospel, that they do not accept them; but it is because they choose to remain rebels, and to justify and defend themselves in their rebellion. Their plea of inability is a self-justifying, and God-condemning plea. It is virtually charging God with injustice and severity, and justifying themselves in persisting in their enmity and opposition to him. It is fortifying their strong hold, instead of giving it up, and attempting to bring God to their terms, instead of yielding to his. It is their obstinacy, and not their impotency, that is the sole cause of their rejecting the counsel of God against themselves; and he will treat them accordingly, and say, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." God is not deceived, and will not be mocked, by his rebellious subjects.

4. If God arms his ministers with spiritual and powerful weapons; then they have good *ground*, to be bold and courageous in attacking his enemies in their strong holds. It gives soldiers courage and resolution to be well armed, to be engaged in a good cause, and to know, that the strong holds of the enemy are not impregnable, but may be completely destroyed. And the ministers of the gospel have still better grounds to be bold and courageous in attacking the enemies of God in their strong holds. They know that their weapons are spiritual and powerful, and have often done great execution. They know,

that they are engaged in a good cause; that the strong holds of the enemy are not impregnable, but have been often attacked and destroyed; and that God has promised to be with them, and to afford them all the aid and assistance they need. Why should they be afraid to declare all the counsel of God, and to point all the great and weighty truths of the gospel at the hearts and consciences of all, who are fortifying themselves in their groundless and criminal rebellion against God? The armory of the gospel contains a great variety of spiritual weapons; and they have a right to employ any one of them, or every one of them, as they find occasion, in pointing any divine truth to the understandings, and the consciences of sinners. The greatest and heaviest truths are the most mighty and powerful to penetrate, wound, and subdue the minds of sinners. No minister need to be afraid to use the heaviest and sharpest spiritual weapons against those, who have only carnal weapons to defend themselves. The great and powerful truths of the gospel, are the best weapons, not only to attack and subdue sinners, but to defend those who use them. The preachers of the gospel are always safe, so long as they plainly and faithfully preach the truth, and no longer. And they are not only safe, but really successful; the truths which they preach, always produce the effects, which God designs, and which they ought to desire, should be produced. "Now thanks be unto God," saith the apostle, "which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life." What greater encouragement can ministers have or desire, than to know, that if they plainly and faithfully preach the great and powerful truths of the gospel, they shall certainly be successful?

5. If God puts spiritual weapons into the hands of ministers, for the sole purpose of their employing them in pulling down the strong holds of sinners; then they are extremely unfaithful and criminal in giving up their spiritual weapons into the hands of sinners themselves. This sinners always desire them to do; and often plead with them to do, and not unfrequently prevail upon them to do. Their spiritual weapons are all taken from the gospel, and consist in the peculiar and important truths of it. But how many sinners not only desire them, but plead with them to give up these weapons to them; and sometimes threaten them, if they refuse to do it? And how many ministers, through fear or favor, comply with their wishes and demands?

Is it not notorious, that some ministers give up one great truth; some another great truth; and some all the great truths of the gospel; and exert all their ingenuity and learning, to explain away, or disprove them? This is giving up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, into the hands of sinners, to employ it in defending themselves in their opposition to God; and it is the strongest weapon they have, and that which they most frequently and successfully employ in fortifying and defending themselves in their hostility to God. Sinners derive some of the strongest weapons, which they ever use in their self-defence, from ministers, who either misconstrue and misrepresent, or deny the pure and potent truths of the gospel. Nothing strengthens the hearts and hands of sinners more, than to hear the doctrine of the blessed Trinity denied; the doctrine of the divine decrees denied; the doctrine of the divine agency denied; the doctrine of total depravity denied; the doctrine of special grace denied; the doctrine of unreserved submission denied; the doctrine of natural ability denied; the duty of immediate repentance and faith denied; and the doctrine of eternal punishment denied. How often do they find these great and essential doctrines of the gospel denied in the books they read, and in the sermons they hear? And how many materials do ministers afford them, to build their strong holds, and how many weapons do they put into their hands to defend themselves in their opposition to God, and in their opposition to those who employ only spiritual weapons, in their preaching? When ministers resign their spiritual weapons into the hands of sinners, they are as weak, and weaker than other men; and the enemies of truth feel themselves abundantly able to resist all their carnal reasonings. Instead of pulling down, they build up the strong holds of sinners. And this is betraying their trusts, and ruining themselves and others.

6. Since all sinners are constantly and zealously engaged in building strong holds in defence of their rebellion against God; it is much to be lamented, when any able and faithful ministers, who have employed their spiritual weapons in pulling down the strong holds of sinners, are not suffered to continue in their spiritual warfare by reason of death. The late removal of Dr. Spring from the stage of action is much to be lamented, not only by his family, his friends, his own church and congregation, but by the pious public at large. He was a brave and faithful soldier of Jesus Christ. He fought a good fight, and he kept the faith to his dying day. No minister was more correct in his religious sentiments. And few ministers of late, have done more to promote the cause of truth. He not

only faithfully discharged his ministerial duties to his own flock, but he was one of the first members, and the last President of the Massachusetts Missionary Society. He was one of the first movers and promoters of the theological seminary at Andover. He was one of the first movers and promoters of the Foreign Missionary Society, and the vice president of it. And all these offices he filled with fidelity and dignity. But alas this standard-bearer is fallen, and the friends of Zion have rarely, if ever, had more reason to lament the decease of any minister, than the death of Dr. Spring. There is reason to fear, that the breach will not be healed, and the wide chasm his death has made will not be filled up; but the cause of truth will be greatly weakened. This I fear and feel. Hence,

7. It behoves the friends of God at this day, when sinners are increasing, and continually erecting and fortifying their strong holds, to pray that he would raise up, commission, and arm many pious young men with spiritual weapons, to pull down their strong castles of defence. The enemy are multiplying and boasting.

SERMON XL.

CONSOLATION OF FAITHFUL MINISTERS.

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."—2 Timothy, iv. 6, 7.

This second epistle Paul wrote to Timothy from Rome, when he was a prisoner there, and in danger of his life, as appears by these words, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." He had great reason to expect, on account of his advanced age, and of the power and prejudice of his enemies, that he should be soon called to seal his testimony to the gospel by his blood. And expositors are generally agreed, that this was the last letter he ever wrote. He had a peculiar attachment to Timothy, whom he calls his own son in the faith. By *the faith*, he means that faith which he had kept, or the gospel itself, and not merely that gracious exercise, which is more frequently called faith. He often uses this phraseology to signify the gospel. By the faith, he means the gospel, when he says to Timothy, in his first epistle, "Fight the good fight of faith." Speaking of the gospel to the Romans, he says, "It is the word of faith, which we preach." Speaking of the churches of Judea, who first heard of his conversion, he says, "But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed;" that is, the gospel. We read, that Felix "sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ;" that is, the gospel itself. This gospel, or word of faith, the apostle in the context solemnly exhorts Timothy to preach with the greatest constancy and fidelity. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Chfist, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke,

exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." To comfort Timothy under such a solemn charge, and in the view of such a weighty and arduous work, the apostle suggests the consolation which he had derived from having faithfully kept the faith of the gospel, which had been committed to his trust. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." This was as much as to say, Be of good courage, Timothy, for I can assure you from my own experience, that if you faithfully discharge the important trust reposed in you, it will give you peculiar satisfaction and joy when you are about to leave the world. This, therefore, is the plain truth which presents itself to our present consideration:

That if ministers fight the good fight of faith in keeping the gospel, which is committed to their trust, it will afford them ground of consolation, when they are about to finish their course. I shall,

I. Show that the gospel is committed to the trust of ministers.

II. That it is by a constant warfare that they keep this trust.

III. That if they do keep it, it will afford them a ground of consolation, when they are about to finish their course.

I. I am to show that the gospel is committed to the trust of ministers. This the apostle plainly and repeatedly asserts. "Though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me." Again he says, "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." And again he says, "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." Ministers are represented, both in the Old and New Testament, as men in office, who are vested with a peculiar right to preach the gospel, to administer divine ordinances, and to lead in the discipline of the church. The apostle says, "Let a man so ac-

count of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." He subjoins the reason. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." This implies that ministers, like all other stewards, have a trust committed to them. And it is on account of their sacred character and official trust, that the apostle says to Christians, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." The gospel, which is committed to ministers, is the most solemn and sacred trust ever committed to men, and lays them under the highest responsibility to be faithful. I now proceed,

II. To show that it requires them to maintain a constant warfare, in order to keep the gospel, which is committed to their trust. The apostle declares that he found it necessary to maintain a constant warfare, in order to keep the faith. "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith," by which he means the gospel, that was committed to him to keep. And if he could not keep the gospel without maintaining a constant warfare, we may well believe, that none of his successors in the ministry can keep it without equal struggles and conflicts. It is absolutely necessary that they should maintain this warfare, in order to keep the gospel, in various respects. And,

1. In respect to their own hearts. To keep the law of love in the heart, is to exercise that love which the law requires; and to keep the gospel of grace in the heart, is to exercise those gracious affections, which the gospel of grace requires. All the ministers of the gospel profess to receive the gospel into their hearts, and in consecrating themselves to their sacred office, they solemnly engage to keep the spirit of it there. They are bound to love all the doctrines, precepts, and prohibitions of the gospel, and constantly to exercise every Christian grace and virtue, which they teach and inculcate. The gospel binds themselves, as well as the people to whom they preach, to keep themselves in the love of God, and to guard their hearts against every selfish and sinful affection. But in their present state of moral imperfection, it requires a constant conflict, in order to keep the gospel in their hearts, against both their internal and external enemies. Their sinful affections are opposed to their holy affections, which creates a constant conflict within; and this internal conflict exposes them to an external conflict with the world, the men of the world, and the spirit of the world, which tend to alienate their affections from God, and from the gospel. The gospel condemns them, as well as their

hearers, for every worldly, sinful affection. While they preach the doctrines, the precepts, and the prohibitions of the gospel, they condemn themselves, if they do not *love* the doctrines they preach, if they do not internally exercise the virtues and graces which they inculcate, and if they do not resist and overcome the evil affections which they reprove and condemn. They need to wear, and constantly employ the whole Christian armor, in order to keep themselves in the love of God, and in the love of the gospel which they preach. No men have so much need to maintain a constant warfare with the world as the ministers of the gospel. It is their official duty to attack the world, which naturally excites the world to retaliate. And in order to retaliate the most effectually, they attack ministers in their most vulnerable parts, that is, their moral imperfections. They attacked Aaron in this part, and prevailed. They attacked the whole body of priests in the ten tribes, and prevailed. They attacked Peter in this part, and prevailed. And they still attack ministers in the same manner. They know that they are not perfectly free from selfishness, and consequently are vulnerable in point of moral imperfection. This is their weak side, which requires them to maintain a constant warfare, to defend it against the shafts of the world. And it is only by keeping the gospel in their hearts, and exercising those gracious affections which the gospel requires, that they can gain the victory over their spiritual enemies. Hence says the apostle John, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." The shield of faith is a spiritual weapon, upon which the ministers of the gospel may safely rely, to repel all the fiery darts that can be pointed against them.

2. Ministers must maintain a constant warfare, in order to keep the gospel in their lives, as well as in their hearts. To keep the gospel in their lives, is to live as the gospel requires them to live, as men, as Christians, and as ministers of Christ. The gospel requires them to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;" and to be examples to believers, "in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity;" and like all other Christians, to do "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report," and to "abstain from all appearance of evil." It is impossible for ministers to live as the gospel requires, and discharge all their Christian and official duties, without incurring the displeasure of the ungodly. For "an unjust man is an abomination to the just; and he that is

upright in the way, is abomination to the wicked." Ministers cannot live godly lives, as the gospel they preach requires them to live, without contending with the ungodly and unbelieving. This the most faithful and exemplary ambassadors of God have found to be true, by painful experience. Elijah had to contend with Ahab, at the risk of his life; and Jeremiah had to contend with the rulers, the priests, and people of Israel, at the risk of his life; which made him lament his unhappy lot. "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth." The apostles had to fight their way in the world, in order to live and act according to the gospel they preached. They were charged with disturbing the peace, and turning the world upside down. The civil and ecclesiastical rulers commanded Peter and John not to speak, nor teach in the name of Jesus. But they boldly replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." They have to contend with both the smiles and frowns of their people, which tend to make unhappy impressions on their minds. Ministers naturally desire to please, and as naturally fear to offend their people, with whom they live and converse, to whom they preach, and on whom they are peculiarly dependent. And if they do not maintain a constant warfare with their smiles and frowns, they will most certainly swerve from their duty of keeping the faith. But when they make it appear by their lives and conversation, that they love and obey the gospel which they preach, they carry conviction to the most thoughtless and stupid, that the gospel is a divine reality and infinitely important. Paul kept the faith by living under its powerful and transforming influence. He loved, believed, obeyed, and relied on the gospel, to save his own soul from everlasting destruction. Hence he says, "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."

3. Ministers must maintain a constant warfare, in order to keep the faith, in their preaching. The principal part of their official work is to preach the gospel, which comprises a whole system of essential doctrines and duties. And whenever these have been properly preached, they have always been hated and opposed. Christ and his apostles met with great opposition in preaching the gospel in its purity and simplicity. Paul had to fight a good fight, in order to keep the faith in his preaching. And he did keep the faith, by preaching the gospel plainly and fully, at all events. This he frequently and solemnly declared,

and appealed to his hearers for the truth of his declarations He says to the Corinthians that he meant to preach the gospel to them as plainly as possible. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit, and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." "Therefore," says he again, "seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty; not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." And he said, that in preaching in the church, he had rather use five plain words, than ten thousand words that were unintelligible and uninstructive, and calculated to disguise the truth. He preached the gospel fully, as well as plainly. He preached *all* the great and essential doctrines and duties contained in the gospel, without reserve. He said to the Elders of Ephesus, "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." But Paul had to contend earnestly, in order to keep this faith which was delivered unto the saints. He had to contend with the Jews, who complained of him for preaching against the law. "When Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law." He had to contend with false teachers, who came where he was preaching, and opposed the pure doctrines of the gospel, which he taught. He had to contend with apostates, who renounced the gospel which they once professed to embrace, and turned bitter enemies to it. Such were Hymeneus and Philetus, Demas and Alexander the coppersmith. He had occasion to reprove and rebuke Peter, who was once seduced into error by the dissimulation of the enemies of truth. And he was once greatly tried by the desertion of his friends,

when he appeared before the Emperor of Rome, to plead the cause of truth. He says, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Thus Paul had to fight a good fight, in order to keep the faith, against the numerous and formidable enemies of the gospel. And the offence of the cross has not yet ceased. Ministers cannot preach the gospel plainly and fully as the apostle did, without maintaining the same constant warfare, which he maintained in the defence of the truth. It now remains,

III. To show that if ministers do, by a constant warfare, keep the faith; it will afford them a ground of consolation, when they are about to finish their course. It was very consoling to Paul, to reflect, that he had fought a good fight and kept the faith through a long, laborious, and trying life, to the time he was just ready to finish his course, and leave the world. And it must afford consolation to any minister, when they are about to give account of their stewardship, to be conscious that they have faithfully kept the gospel, which was committed to their trust. For,

In the first place, it must yield them satisfaction, to reflect that they have been consistent in their religious sentiments, and not been carried about with every wind of doctrine, and moved from their steadfastness. If we consult the Bible or ecclesiastical history, we shall find that those who have entered into the ministry have been given to change more than any other order of men. Instead of gaining the victory over the world, the world have gained the victory over them. How often were the Jewish priests seduced into error, delusion, and idolatry? How often did the apostles complain of false teachers and apostates in their day, who taught damnable doctrines? And how have such unstable and inconsistent teachers multiplied ever since? A consciousness of self-inconsistency must be extremely painful to those, who have perverted, corrupted, and betrayed the gospel which had been committed to their trust. And on the other hand, it must be a source of peculiar consolation to any ministers, to reflect that they have plainly, fully, and consistently preached the gospel, while so many have made shipwreck of the faith.

In the second place, it must afford those ministers who have kept the faith a source of satisfaction, that they have been in some measure instrumental in guarding their people against abounding and dangerous errors. Where the gospel is plainly, fully, and consistently preached, the people in general can hardly fail of adopting in speculation, at least, correct religious

sentiments; and of seeing the absurdity of false and unscriptural doctrines. A line of orthodox ministers from the apostles' days to the present time, has been the principal barrier against the flood of error, which would otherwise have overwhelmed the world. Paul told the Elders of Ephesus, "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Those ministers who keep the faith, sincerely desire, that their people may keep it, while they live and after they are dead. And if they are conscious that they have said and done all that they could to preserve them from gross and fatal errors, it must afford them some hope, that they have not labored among them altogether in vain.

Finally, a consciousness of having kept the faith, must be a peculiar source of consolation to aged ministers in the nearest views of eternity. They can reflect upon the past, and anticipate the future, with the joyful hopes of a blessed immortality beyond the grave. No man, perhaps, ever could look back upon his past trials, sufferings, conflicts, and victories, with so much pleasure, and at the same time look forward with such bright and glorious prospects, as the apostle Paul did, just as he was finishing his course. He speaks the language of triumph. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If it belongs to ministers to keep the faith of the Gospel which is committed to their trust; then they have a very great and arduous work to perform. Their office is not a mere sinecure, which allows them to live in ease and indolence; but an office, which requires intense study, weighty cares, and a constant warfare. They cannot keep the faith, without understanding it, and they cannot understand it, without much reading, meditation and study, which require a perpetual exertion of all their mental powers and faculties. It is no easy matter to preach all the great and essential doctrines and duties of the gospel plainly, fully, and in their perfect harmony, and connection, and apply them, without fear or favor, to persons of all

ages, characters, and conditions. And it is still more difficult and dangerous to attack the enemies of truth, and carry the war into their own camp. Ministers are called Overseers, Watchmen, Soldiers, and Stewards of the mysteries of God. All these appellations denote, that their office is very great, important, and extremely arduous and responsible. To live a life of a soldier, is to live a life of constant warfare, hardship, and danger. Paul says that he actually lived such a life, while fighting the good fight of faith. The account which he gives of it to some of his fellow-laborers, who were disposed to depreciate his labors and sufferings, was enough to cover them with shame and confusion of face. He confidently asks them, "Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Though the present state of the world, does not require such extreme labor and sufferings of ministers in general at this day; yet their cares, and labors, and conflicts are probably greater than those that commonly fall to the lot of other professional men. Much of their labor, many of their cares, and some of their heaviest burdens are known only to themselves. They are sometimes called, as the prophet was, to stand upon the watch-tower in the day-time, and to sit in their ward whole nights. If their people are in prosperity, or adversity, or if any important event takes place among them, it directly or indirectly affects them, and creates new cares and watchfulness.

2. Since the work of the ministry is such a great and arduous work, it highly concerns those who are about to enter into it, to anticipate the greatness, importance, and difficulties of it. Young men are in danger of imbibing a common mistake, that the ministerial office is a very easy, as well as reputable office to discharge. This lays a foundation for disappointment, discouragement, and unfaithfulness. Not a few shrink from a constant warfare, and neglect to keep the faith. They omit to preach some doctrines and duties of the gospel, and artfully

disguise others, and choose to please men, rather than to fight the good fight of faith. To my knowledge, some who began to run well, have been hindered, either by not keeping the gospel in their hearts, or by hearkening to the advice of others, who ought to have given them better instruction. There has been, for several years past, a great falling off among young ministers and candidates, in point of keeping the faith. Like Demas, they have forsaken those whom they once followed, having loved this present world. Among the numerous candidates, who are now on the stage, and coming on the stage, it is difficult to find any who have counted the cost of maintaining the ministerial warfare, and determined to keep the faith, at all events. This affords a melancholy prospect to ministers who are about to finish their course, and to churches that are about to be left vacant.

3. If the gospel of the grace of God be committed to the trust of ministers; then they must be verily guilty, if they do not keep the faith. They ought to know the gospel before they undertake to preach it, and to know that their work is a warfare, and requires them to contend with their own hearts, with their own lives, and with all those who deny or oppose the gospel. They are volunteers in their work; no man could constrain them to enter into the ministry, and take charge of the gospel and of the souls of men. They have freely and solemnly bound themselves to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, and to be workers together with him in promoting his cause and the salvation of sinners. If they misunderstand, misconstrue, or pervert the great doctrines and duties of the gospel, they rob God of his glory, and expose their people to perish forever in their sins. God has set them as watchmen, and commanded them to warn the people from him, and if they neglect to give the people warning, they must die without warning, but their blood will he require at the watchmen's hands. God has everywhere in his word threatened unfaithful ministers with the severest marks of his everlasting displeasure, and they must be of all men the most miserable.

4. If the glorious gospel of the blessed God be committed to ministers, then the people are very competent to judge whether they have kept the faith, and fulfilled the solemn trust reposed in them. They know the important doctrines and duties of the gospel, whether they like or dislike them, and consequently they know whether ministers plainly, fully, and consistently preach them, or handle the word of God deceitfully, by corrupting or perverting it. Paul acknowledged those who had heard him preach, to be competent judges, whether he had

kept the faith, and subjects himself to their decision. He said to the Elders of Ephesus, "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons; and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." He then calls upon them to testify, that he did not preach one thing to the Jews, and another to the Greeks; or that he did not seek to please men, and accommodate the doctrines and duties of the gospel to the tastes, desires, or prejudices of his hearers, but approved himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. If the people were capable of judging correctly, whether Paul kept the faith, then every people are capable of judging, whether their minister has kept the faith in his preaching; especially if he has preached among them a long time, even to old age. It is often said, that old ministers become more lax in their religious sentiments, and more catholic towards sectarians, who differ from them, or oppose them, in doctrinal points. This observation is undoubtedly just in regard to some aged ministers, who once contended earnestly, both from the pulpit and the press, with those who doubted, or denied, or opposed some or all the cardinal doctrines and duties of the gospel. But Paul cordially and fully embraced the gospel at first, and fought a good fight in keeping the faith to his dying hour. And if other aged ministers have kept the faith, their people may know it; for they have heard them preach in every stage and circumstance of life. There never were such great changes in the principles, customs, and manners of the people in this country, as have taken place in the course of the last fifty years. Those ministers, therefore, who have kept the faith during this long period, may easily be distinguished from such as have become Arminians, Antinomians, Methodists, Unitarians, and Universalists. These have been trying times to both ministers and people, and if there have been apostasies among either, those who have apostatized may be easily discovered, whether they wish to conceal themselves or not.

5. If ministers have to maintain a constant warfare, in order to keep the faith; then they stand in need of the prayers and assistance of their people. Though Paul had superior powers of mind, which had been strengthened and improved by reading, learning, and observation; and though he possessed every

ministerial qualification to the highest degree; yet he felt himself weak and unequal to the cares, labors, and conflicts attending the great and arduous work of the ministry. This he acknowledged in speaking of himself and his fellow-apostles. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." Under such an impression of his own weakness and insufficiency to discharge the numerous and weighty duties of his office, he realized his need of the prayers and assistance of Christians, and repeatedly besought their intercessions for him. Urging the Ephesians to pray always with all prayer and supplication for all saints, he adds, "and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth *boldly*, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." To the Hebrews he says, "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." And to the Thessalonians he says, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified; and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men." And to the Romans he says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be *delivered* from them that do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem, may be accepted of the saints." He considered all who prayed for him as aiding and assisting him in his great work; for which he most cordially thanked them. He gratefully mentions Phebe and Urbane, Priscilla and Aquilla, whom he calls his *helpers* in Christ Jesus. Ministers of the gospel at this day, are far more feeble and insufficient for their great and arduous work, than the apostles were, and of course have much more need of the prayers and assistance of their people. A religious people may encourage the heart and strengthen the hands of a minister, not only by praying for him, but by a constant and serious attendance on his preaching, vindicating the doctrines and duties he inculcates, and enforcing them upon the minds of those under their care and instruction. No minister can long be of much service to a people, who grow negligent in attending public worship, and join with the young, the corrupt, and ignorant, in despising or

opposing his instructions. Every civil officer is weak, without the aid and concurrence of those who put him into office; and every minister is weak without the aid and concurrence of those who chose him to be their spiritual teacher and guide. It is not to be supposed that a people carefully realize the labors, the cares, and conflicts, which are inseparable from the ministerial office. But the more they do realize them, the more they will be disposed to pray for a minister, and aid and assist him in every other proper way: especially if he has long fought the good fight of faith, grown gray in their service, and has almost finished his course. When a minister has preached a great while to a people, and they have many of them heard him preach a great while, there is apt to be a languor on both sides. The languor on his side may principally arise from the decays of nature, and the infirmities of age; and the languor on their side may arise from his deficiencies, or from seeing the same man in the same place, and speaking the same things in the same manner. In such a case, an impartial judge would say the strong should support the weak, and the young support the old. It is certain, however, that aged ministers stand in more need of the prayers of their people, and may more properly and forcibly plead for such assistance.

6. If a minister and his hearers both keep the faith, they are prepared for a happy *separation* in this world, and a happy *meeting* in the next. This must be a source of mutual consolation, when the one and the other view the time of their departure at hand, and they are just finishing their course. Paul derived peculiar consolation from looking back upon time, and looking forward to eternity, while he was fighting the good fight of faith, and when he was about finishing his course; and repeatedly suggested the same happy reflections and anticipations to those who had like precious faith. To the Corinthians he writes in this pleasing strain: "Knowing, that he who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." And he writes in a similar manner to the Thessalonians: "Ye know, how we exhorted and comforted, and

charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" Such hopes and prospects he entertained, and would have those who embraced the gospel he preached, entertain, while passing through the scenes and discharging the duties of life. But as the time of his departure drew near, he indulged higher hopes, and enjoyed brighter prospects, which filled his heart with joy, and gave him a triumphant victory over the world. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me *only*, but unto all them *also* that love his appearing." This was a happy parting between Paul and Timothy and his other spiritual children, and a good preparation for a more happy meeting in the world of glory. There must be *a parting* between a minister and his people, however long they may live together in this world; and if they both keep the faith, they will have *a most happy meeting* at the great and last day.

Everything tells me that I have almost finished my course, and the time of my departure is at hand. This day finishes *fifty years* of my ministry among you. I must soon leave you, and you all must, one after another, follow me into eternity, where the serious consequences of our long mutual relation will be seen and realized forever. These cannot be judged before the time. But is there not ground to hope, that some of us have fought a good fight, and kept the faith, and that we shall have a joyful meeting in the mansions of the blessed, and receive a crown of righteousness, which shall never fade away? Though we have lived in a very eventful period; yet nothing very extraordinary has happened, which deserves particular notice. Your Pastor entered into this vineyard, which had been well cultivated before he came into it. He has had peculiar motives to labor here with diligence and activity. He hopes he has sown some good seed, which in time to come will spring up and bear fruit unto eternal life. He gratefully acknowledges that he has had the pleasure of seeing several small

harvests. God has graciously smiled upon the pastor and people in this place during *fifty years*, which is a long period of ministerial life. There have been about two hundred and twenty persons admitted into the church, and probably as many dismissed from it, as have been received from other churches. There have been about four hundred and thirty baptisms, and about five hundred and twenty deaths, in the course of these fifty years past. The pastor and people have reason to set up their Ebenezer, and say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." In reviewing what is past, we have all undoubtedly much cause to lament our great negligence, unfruitfulness, and unfaithfulness in the service of God; and no less cause to fight the good fight of faith with increasing vigor, fortitude, and zeal, till we have finished our course, and entered into everlasting rest.

SERMON XLI.

THE GRATITUDE OF FAITHFUL MINISTERS AT THE RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL AS THE WORD OF GOD.

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."—1 Thess. ii. 13.

The apostles were not always successful in preaching. They were sometimes viewed as impostors, and the gospel which they preached as a cunningly devised fable. But some, however, considered and treated them as the servants of the most high God, who showed unto them the way of salvation. This was true of the Thessalonians, who gave them a kind reception, and cordially embraced the gospel of Christ. They were, therefore, sincerely thankful to God, that he had enabled them to preach, and disposed the Thessalonians to hear the gospel, as his word, and not as their own. "For this cause," say they, "thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which worketh effectually in you that believe." It was a grateful consideration to the apostles, who had preached nothing but the pure gospel, to find that their hearers had received it, not as their word, but as the word of God. And since all faithful ministers possess the apostolic spirit, we may justly draw this general conclusion,

That all who preach the pure gospel are thankful, when their hearers receive it as *God's word*, and not as their own.

In order to illustrate this subject, it is proposed to consider,

I. What is implied in preaching the pure gospel.

II. What is implied in hearing it as the word of God.

III. Why those who preach the pure gospel are thankful,

when their hearers receive it as the word of God, and not as their own.

I. Let us consider what is implied in preaching the pure gospel. The commission, which Christ gave to his apostles just before he ascended to heaven, runs in this form: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Agreeably to this commission, they confined the subject matter of their preaching to the plain, pure gospel itself. So they expressly and solemnly declare. "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts.—We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.—But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty; not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Paul makes these declarations in the name of his fellow-apostles; and speaking in his own name, he says to the Corinthians, "I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." But to the Galatians he speaks in plainer and more solemn terms. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.' Thus the apostles preached the pure gospel, and all their successors in the ministry ought to follow their example, and preach the gospel, and nothing but the gospel, as plainly, as fully, and as extensively as they did; which implies,

1. Preaching that scheme of salvation, which God has devised and revealed in his word. The Bible contains a scheme of grace, which was formed before the foundation of the world, and never began to be revealed till after the fall of man. This plan of redeeming love comprises the whole gospel. It summarily contains all that ministers have to preach, and all that faithful ministers do preach. The apostles made this wise and gracious scheme of salvation the sum and substance of their preaching. Look into the second chapter of Acts, and there you will find Peter representing the gospel as a scheme, which

God has been pursuing and unfolding for ages. Read the seventh chapter of Acts, and there you will see Stephen tracing the means and instruments God employed from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Solomon, and from Solomon to Christ, to develope and carry into effect his eternal purpose of saving sinners through the sufferings and death of the divine Redeemer. Paul tells us in the third chapter of Ephesians, that he made it his main object in preaching the gospel, to trace it up to that original purpose of God, which involves all the works of creation, providence, and redemption. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The apostle was conscious to himself, that he had plainly and fully laid open this great and comprehensive plan of redemption, and therefore he could confidently say to those who had heard him preach, "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." The gospel contains nothing more, nor less than the whole counsel of God; and for this reason it is impossible to preach any part of it in a true and consistent manner, without representing it as a part of the great and extensive plan of redemption.

2. Preaching the pure gospel implies preaching the pure and important doctrines of which it is composed. Every whole is made up of its constituent parts. The whole gospel consists of a variety of great and fundamental doctrines, which are essential to it. And in order to preach the whole gospel, or declare the whole counsel of God, those doctrines are to be exhibited, explained, supported, and inculcated fully and forcibly. The great and amiable character of God is to be delineated as it appears in the work of redemption. It was devised and adopted by Him, before the world began. He appears to be the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of it. "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," and in all his operations, he appears not only wise, and powerful, and just, and good; but also as absolutely sovereign. He forms whom he pleases into vessels of mercy, and whom he pleases into vessels of wrath. The glorious character of the Lord Jesus Christ is

to be exhibited in all its beauty and importance. He is to be preached as God and man in two natures and one person; as the only Mediator between God and man, who by his sufferings and death on the cross, made complete atonement for sin; as the present Governor of the universe, and the final Judge of the whole intelligent creation, at the last day. The real character of man in his fallen and perishing state is to be set in the plainest and strongest light. By the first offence of Adam, all men are become dead in trespasses and sins. There is none good, no, not one; they are all by nature under the entire dominion of a carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Upon this single point, that all mankind deserve that eternal death, which the divine law threatens to every transgressor, the whole gospel is founded. Accordingly, the Saviour himself says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The doctrine of regeneration by the special influence of the divine Spirit, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the doctrine of the final perseverance of believers in holiness and obedience, and the doctrine of future and eternal rewards, are all contained in the gospel, and are to be plainly taught and solemnly inculcated by every minister of Christ. And so long as he teaches these doctrines in their proper harmony and connection, without adding to, or taking anything from them, he will really preach the true Gospel. Let us next consider,

II. What is implied in receiving the preached gospel, as the word of God. The Thessalonians received the gospel preached by the apostles as the word of God, and not as their word. "Ye received it," they gratefully acknowledge, "not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God." But what is it to hear the preaching of the gospel in this peculiar and proper manner? It is, in the first place, to attend to the *matter*, rather than to the *manner* of what is preached. While hearers attend entirely to the voice, or the gestures, or the style, or the ingenuity, or learning of the preacher, they do not receive what he delivers as the word of God. For all such things as belong to the manner of preaching are merely human, not divine. But the matter, delivered by one who preaches the pure gospel, is of God, and not of man; and what is human may be as clearly distinguished from what is divine, as the chaff from the wheat. Paul was a real orator, and his genuine oratory consisted in his pure and proper language, his just and weighty sentiments, and in the pathos of his benevolent heart, rather than in his appearance, voice, and pronunciation.

In these there were visible defects. These his candid hearers overlooked, and attended to the divine truths which he delivered in the demonstration of the spirit and of power. This was the conduct of the Thessalonians, who regarded the matter, rather than the manner of his preaching; and all who receive the word preached as the word of God, and not as the word of man, do always hear it in the same manner. Their attention is fixed upon the treasure, and not upon the earthen vessel that contains it. Their minds rise higher than to the man, and ascend to God whose word they hear. This was the resolution of those who came to hear Peter preach at the house of Cornelius. "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." They meant to hear God speaking by Peter, and all who come to hear the gospel preached ought to hear and embrace it, as the word of God, and not as the word of man.

In the second place, to receive the gospel as the word of God, implies hearing it with a sense of its divine authority. As it is God who speaks in the gospel; so all its precepts, prohibitions, admonitions, invitations, and even promises come clothed with all the authority of the Creator and supreme Sovereign of the universe. The word of God is unspeakably more binding than the word of man, and it loses nothing of its sacred authority by passing through the lips of a feeble mortal. God may send his gospel by whom he will send, and to whomsoever he sends it, it comes sanctioned with his own infinite authority. This all who hear the gospel as the word of God realize to be true. They feel not at liberty to hear, or to forbear; but bound by infinite authority to regard the will of God conveyed to them in his own way. If this obligation be not realized, by those who hear the pure gospel preached, they will not receive it as the word of God, but merely as the word of man. It alters not the case whether people pay a greater or less attention to what is preached. For they may pay as great attention to the word of man as to the word of God. It is necessarily implied in hearing the pure gospel as the word of God, that men believe and realize the infinite authority with which it is clothed.

It must be further observed, in the last place, that to receive the preached gospel as the word of God, implies a cordial subjection to it. People may hear the gospel preached, and realize their obligations to embrace it, while at the same time, they inwardly hate and reject it. This is hearing, but not properly receiving the gospel as the word of God. The Thessalonians cordially embraced the gospel preached by the apostles, as the

word of God, and not as the word of man. They heard it with an obedient ear, or as it is expressed in another place, they obeyed the truth which they heard. On the day of Pentecost three thousand gladly received the word. The whole gospel is worthy of all acceptation. All who properly receive the gospel as the word of God, take a peculiar pleasure in the precious and important truths contained in it. They delightfully hear all the doctrines and duties of Christianity explained and inculcated. When they hear God speaking to them in the gospel, they feel as David did when he said, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb." Or rather they feel as the disciples felt under the teaching of Christ himself. "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" The word of God is an expression of his heart; and those who receive the gospel as his word, receive him in it. Hence says Christ to his faithful ministers, "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." Receiving the gospel as the word of God implies, not only a belief of its truth and a sense of its divine authority; but a supreme love to God himself, who has displayed all his glory in the gospel way of salvation. In this manner, the Thessalonians received the gospel preached by the apostles, as the word of God, and not as the word of man. And all who hear the pure gospel preached ought to hear it as the word of God, and not as the word of man, and to receive it into a good and honest heart, that it may bring forth fruit unto eternal life. It now remains to consider,

III. Why those who preach the pure gospel are thankful, when their people hear it as the word of God, and not as their own. The apostles were sincerely thankful when they found, that any who had heard them preach the gospel, heard it, not as their word, but as the word of God. They say to the Thessalonians, "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God." There are two or three very good reasons why those who preach the pure gospel sincerely, should be thankful when it is heard, not as their word, but as the word of God. And,

1. Because they attain an important end, which they have in view in preaching the gospel. It is with them a great object to exhibit divine truth in all their public discourses.

Whenever they preach the gospel, it is their real desire and intention to lay open the great and interesting truths contained in it. The principal part of their ministerial work is to be done by the exhibition of divine truth. If they are to edify the body of Christ, and feed his sheep and lambs; this is to be done by the exhibition of divine truth. If they are to reform the vicious, to enlighten the ignorant, to convince the erroneous, to awaken the secure, or turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; this is to be done by the exhibition of divine truth. They are to preach the gospel, and apply it to all, according to their various characters, stations, and circumstances. They have only to exhibit matter of light, conviction, and comfort before the minds of their hearers. And this matter is to be drawn from the pure source of the gospel. When the twelve apostles were sent forth upon their important mission, Christ directed them to preach the pure gospel, and plainly exhibit the only terms of salvation. If men would embrace them, well; but if not, they were to turn their backs, and shake off the dust of their feet against them. Paul considered his ministerial duty in the same light, and determined to know nothing in his preaching, "save Jesus Christ and him crucified." It is the appropriate and important business of the preachers of the gospel, to exhibit the great and interesting truths contained in it before the minds of their hearers, with a view to gain the approbation of their conscience and heart; and if they gain this point, they obtain their great object in preaching. Now such success they gratefully ascribe to God. They cannot but be thankful that he has caused them to triumph in Christ, and made them a savor of life unto life to those to whom they have preached the gospel of his grace.

2. Another reason, why those who faithfully preach the pure gospel should be thankful when it is cordially received as the word of God, is, that their people gain the great end which they should aim at in hearing it. This the apostle suggests in the text. "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." The gospel, which the apostle preached to the Thessalonians, produced a happy and saving effect in their hearts. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." And it is the will and appointment of God, "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." This is the end which ought always to be proposed and desired by those who attend upon the preaching of the gospel, and which they will always

obtain, if they cordially receive it as the word of God. Though faithful ministers have a good reason, on their own account, to rejoice when they obtain their end in preaching the gospel; yet they have a much stronger reason to be thankful, when their people obtain their end in hearing it, even the salvation of their souls. But,

3. The principal reason why those who sincerely preach the gospel should rejoice when it is cordially received as the word of God, is because he answers his ultimate end in sending them to preach it. As God sent Christ into the world to save the elect, so he sends his ministers to preach the gospel to save the elect, or those who cordially embrace it. John says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." It was God's design in sending his Son into the world, to save the elect; and it is his design in sending his ministers to preach the gospel to save the elect, whom he has promised Christ shall come to him, and believe in him. And when Christ appointed Paul to preach to the Gentiles, he told him that he sent him "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith." He did not send him to save all the heathen, but those only who should cordially embrace the gospel he preached as the word of God. Accordingly, he tells Timothy that he himself preached the gospel to answer God's design of saving the elect. "Therefore I endure all things *for the elects' sake*, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." All faithful ministers preach the gospel, to answer the purpose of God in sending them to preach, and therefore are thankful when they are enabled to answer his purpose, which is no less than to promote his own glory and the good of the universe in the salvation of sinners. God sent Peter to convert Cornelius. He sent Paul to convert Justus, Crispus, and much people in Corinth. He sent him to Philippi to convert Lydia, and many others there. And thus they answered the purpose of God, for which they were thankful.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. It appears from what has been said, that when the gospel is purely and plainly preached, it carries its own evidence with it, that it is the word of God and not the word of men. Paul preached the gospel purely and plainly, and wherever he

preached it, it carried the evidence of its divinity with it to the apprehension of his hearers. It carried such light to their understanding and conscience, that they knew it must be the word of God and not the word of men. This Paul says was the case when he preached to the Corinthians. "Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." When the pure truths of the gospel are exhibited they appear to be *divine truths*, and not cunningly devised fables. They carry the evidence of their divinity to every mind that properly attends to them. They carried this evidence of their divinity to the Corinthians. And so they did to the Thessalonians. This the apostle declares in our text. "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God." The gospel in its purity and simplicity carries convincing evidence that it is the word of God, and not the word of man. It is this internal evidence of the divinity of the gospel, that has the greatest tendency to convince and convert both Jews and Gentiles in general. The external proofs of its divine inspiration are adapted to convince the learned, rather than the unlearned. The success of the apostles in preaching the gospel depended much more upon their exhibiting the internal, than the external evidence of its truth and divinity. And if ministers now would preach the gospel more purely, plainly, fully, and connectedly, they would carry greater conviction to the understandings and consciences of both the learned and unlearned, of the truth, divinity, and obligations of the gospel, than they do, or can do, by exhibiting the external evidence of Christianity, arising from history, miracles, and prophecies. These, people in general, are very incapable of clearly understanding; but the internal evidence of christianity, arising from the character, perfections, and works of God; and from the gracious design of the gospel, and the doctrines and duties it inculcates, and the invisible scenes and objects of eternity, which it unfolds, all men of every character and capacity are capable of understanding and feeling. Paul tells the Corinthians that he meant to preach the gospel in this manner. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and

him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power." It was by preaching the pure gospel in such a manner, that he commended himself to every man's conscience, and made them feel it was the word of God and not the word of man.

2. If people can know the pure gospel to be the word of God; then they may always know whether ministers preach the word of God, or the word of man. They often complain of their unhappiness in not being able to know whether ministers preach the truth or not. They say, that they differ among themselves, some preaching one doctrine, and some another, and amidst such various and even contradictory doctrines, they cannot know which are right, or which are wrong, or whether they are not all wrong. This is a groundless complaint, for the word of God is very different from the word of man; and when the pure gospel is preached plainly, every hearer may know it is the word of God, and not a mere human device and deception. The Thessalonians to whom Paul preached the gospel were heathen before he preached to them; but they, he says, were capable of knowing it to be the word of God, and cordially believed and received it as the word of God and not the word of man. And he severely reproves the Galatians for not knowing, that the gospel which he had preached to them was the word of God, and given by divine inspiration. "I marvel, that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would *pervert* the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." After Paul had preached the pure gospel plainly to the Galatians, they were wholly inexcusable for not knowing and embracing it, as the word of God, and hearkening to false teachers, who preached another gospel, or the mere word of man, which was no gospel at all. It is now equally inexcusable and criminal for any person, or any religious society, to whom the pure gospel has been plainly preached, not to know it is the word of God, and to follow false teachers, who preach fatal errors, which are the mere traditions and commandments of men.

They have no right to plead in excuse, that they do not know that the pure gospel they have heard is the word of God, and cannot distinguish it from the word of man, which they hear from self-deceived and deceiving errorists. They are not to be pitied for their ignorance, because it is voluntary. They are capable of distinguishing the word of God from the word of man. No false teacher could deceive them, if they were not willing to be deceived. The deceiver and the deceived must both meet the same fate. Let every one take heed how and what he hears.

3. If those who preach the pure gospel plainly, are thankful when it is cordially received as the word of God, then it must be very painful and grievous to them to find it is received as the word of man. They have the same reasons to lament, when the gospel they preach is received as the word of man, as they have to rejoice, when it is received as the word of God. And as they are thankful, when the gospel they preach is received as the word of God; so they are pained and grieved, when it is received as the word of man. The faithful ministers of the gospel have always had abundant reason to lament, that so many have heard it as the word of man, and not as the word of God. It was foretold of Christ, that he should have occasion to lament and cry, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? And when he appeared, and spake as never man spake, the most of his hearers received the gospel he preached, not as the word of God, but as the word of man. He was often grieved for the hardness of their hearts; and when he was just about leaving the world, he wept over Jerusalem, where he had so long labored in vain, and spent his strength for nought, saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." The prophets who delivered the divine messages to men, lamented that they were so often received, not as the word of God, but as mere human fables and devices. Ezekiel was grieved, and said, "Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?" Jeremiah was deeply and grievously affected, when he found the divine messages he delivered were despised and rejected. He cried, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." The faithful ministers of the gospel have reason to lament, when they lose their great end in preaching the gospel, and when their people lose their great end in hearing the gospel, and when God loses his great end in sending the gospel to

them, because they receive it not as the word of God, but as the word of man. Where is there a faithful minister to be found, who has not reason to fear, that the gospel he has preached has not much oftener been heard as the word of man, than as the word of God? and that he has been the savor of death unto death to more than he has been a savor of life unto life, and so has lost more than half his labor? This was a grievous reflection to Paul, and led him to say to those to whom he had preached, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." Make the case of a minister, my hearers, your own case. How would you feel, if you had reason to believe that you had lost more than half the labor you had ever performed: would it not be a painful reflection? But what you have lost may be a gain to others. But what the minister loses by the rejection of the gospel, is an infinite loss to others, as well as a great loss to himself. You may say, if he is faithful, his grief is lightened; but the truth is, it is heightened; for the more faithful he is, the more painful it will be to fear that he shall be a savor of death to his people. Accordingly we find that the most faithful preachers have most bitterly lamented that they have labored in vain.

4. If the gospel be the word of God, then it is a very solemn and important work to preach the gospel. There is no work more arduous, or more responsible, than the work of the ministry. Ministers are "stewards of the mysteries of God," and it is required "in stewards, that a man be found faithful." The spiritual and eternal interests of both the minister and of his people are suspended upon his fidelity. If he preaches the word of man instead of the word of God, he endangers both his own soul and the souls of his people. These solemn motives to fidelity God sets before the minds of those whom he appoints to deliver his messages to his people. God said to Ezekiel, "O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." Such is the solemn responsibility every minister is under, to preach the gospel as the word of God plainly and faithfully. God says, "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: what is the chaff to the wheat? Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent

them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." If ministers preach the word of man, instead of the word of God, they preach error, which is destructive to the souls of men. Ministers are in a solemn situation, in which they must be instrumental of saving or destroying the souls committed to their charge. "And who is sufficient for these things?" It deeply concerns every minister to follow the direction of the apostle to Timothy. "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed to thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

5. If ministers preach the pure gospel plainly, then their hearers are in a solemn situation while they are preaching. They are hearing not the word of man, but the word of God. He, and not man, is speaking, and his word is clothed with infinite authority, and must make impressions that never can be eradicated from the conscience. It is he that offers life, and it is he that threatens death; and he is able to save, or destroy, and none can deliver out of his hands. "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" If ministers in preaching the gospel, preached only the word of man, people might make light of it, and sit and hear it as an oration, or declamation, or anything else, delivered for their amusement. But when they hear the gospel plainly preached, they hear the word of God, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. There is nothing in the universe that can make such deep wounds on the minds of rational, immortal, sinful creatures as the word of God. When people come to the house of God, to hear ministers preach the pure gospel plainly, they ought to feel as Cornelius said he did, when Peter came to preach the gospel to him in his house. "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." While Peter was preaching the pure gospel to this solemn assembly sitting before God, they heard it as the word of God, and it had a powerful and saving effect on their minds, which astonished those who beheld it. While people are sitting to hear the pure gospel preached, they are sitting before God, and hearing his word, and not the word of man, which is a solemn situation to be in; for they must hear, or refuse to hear God himself speak; they must obey or disobey his word; they must accept or reject the great salvation which he offers to them; they must honor, or despise and dishonor God himself. A minister is but the mere organ by which God

speaks to men in the gospel, and therefore when they despise the preaching of the gospel, they despise not man, but God. So Christ told his disciples, when he sent them to preach the gospel in his name. "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." And the apostle says, "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God." Ministers are the mere ambassadors of God, by whom he beseeches sinners to become reconciled to himself on the terms of the gospel. If therefore they disregard the preaching of the gospel, which is the word of God, they reject the counsel of God against themselves, and seal their own destruction. But how extremely apt are people in general to forget this their solemn situation, while they are sitting before God to hear his word, and not the word of man. The preaching and the hearing of the gospel is so common and frequent, that both the preacher and hearer is extremely apt to forget his duty and responsibility to God, and expose himself to his just displeasure. There are innumerable obstructions to the proper hearing of the gospel, from without and from within. The visible objects with which hearers are surrounded, serve to excite their curiosity, and interrupt their thoughts, while hearing the great truths of the gospel. They often come to the house of God with minds preoccupied with the cares and concerns of this life, which repel all thoughts of God and eternity. And in addition to all these, there is another and greater obstruction to hearing the word of God. Christ has told us in the parable of the sower, that there is an enemy to all righteousness, who employs all his power and influence to eradicate all deep impressions made upon the minds of men by the gospel. "Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." Among all the religious duties which men owe to God, there is no one, perhaps, that they so often neglect, as the hearing of the gospel as his word, with a good and honest heart. While they are sitting before God, he is not in all their thoughts. While they are hearing *his* word, they think and feel as though they were hearing the word of *man*. While they are hearing the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which has brought life and immortality to light, and unfolded the invisible scenes and objects of the invisible world, they allow their hearts to wander, with the fool's eyes, to the ends of the earth. If this be a just representation of hearing the gospel which is the word of God, as the word of man, you must know it, and if you know it,

you have reason to reflect upon the sins of your holy things, with deep repentance and godly sorrow.

This subject this day calls upon us to review our past mutual obligations and deficiencies.

This day closes the fifty-second year of my public ministry among you. You called me to preach the gospel, which is the word of God, plainly and faithfully to you. I accepted your call, and engaged to preach the gospel plainly and faithfully to you. You engaged on your part, to hear me preach the gospel, not as the word of man, but as the word of God. The serious mutual question before us is, Have we fulfilled our mutual obligations? I think I can safely say for myself, that I have endeavored to preach the gospel as plainly and fully, as I have been able. I have not meant to keep back anything, which I thought would be profitable unto you, nor shunned to declare all the counsel of God, so far as I understood it. I have taken pains to understand, explain, defend, and inculcate the important doctrines and duties of the gospel, in the best manner I could, for the benefit of saints and of sinners. In respect to preaching the gospel plainly, I am not conscious of very great deficiency. But whether I have preached the gospel *faithfully*, is a more serious and difficult question for me, and more difficult for you, to answer. To preach the gospel faithfully implies a great deal. It implies supreme love to God, and a disinterested regard for the good of souls. I am conscious that I have failed; that I have often failed, and that I have greatly failed; but I hope not entirely failed, of preaching the gospel faithfully. I have rejoiced, when I have seen any cordially receive the gospel, as the word of God; and I have lamented, when I have seen so many receive the gospel, as the word of man, and make light of it; but whether my joy and sorrow have flowed from pure love to God and the souls of men, I feel to be important to determine, and to determine according to truth. My deficiencies, however, in fulfilling my obligations to you, and to God, in preaching the gospel plainly and faithfully, call for my humiliation and godly sorrow. It is yours now to inquire, whether you have faithfully fulfilled your obligations to *hear* the gospel, as the word of God, and not as the word of man. You as really engaged to hear me preach constantly, as I engaged to preach constantly. You had reason to expect that I should preach constantly, if my health permitted; and had not I reason to expect you would, if your health permitted, hear me constantly? The question you now have to answer to yourselves is, whether you have, in your own view, fulfilled your obligation to hear the gospel constantly. I may

judge amiss, but you are capable of judging right, and your duty requires you to do it. But supposing you have heard the gospel constantly, as I believe not a few have, have you heard it *as the word of God*, and not as the word of *man?* I have reason to think, and to be thankful, that some of you have cordially received the gospel, as the word of God, and not as the word of man, and that it has produced a saving effect in your hearts. But have the great majority received the gospel in this manner? Have they not made light of it, and neglected to hear it, from Sabbath to Sabbath, from month to month, and even from year to year? Have they not complained of its doctrines and its duties, and of their being too plainly explained, and strongly inculcated? Have not some entirely denied the true doctrines of the gospel, and embraced gross and fatal errors? Have not some become very inconstant in hearing the gospel? Is not here a breach of obligation on the part of the people? Did they not engage to hear the gospel preached, and preached as the word of God? My hearers, the question is before you, whether the breach of obligation lies upon you, or upon me. It is a melancholy truth, that religion is decaying among us. And are there no secondary causes of it? Preaching appears at present to do but very little good. Must it not be owing to the preacher, or to the hearers? It highly and mutually concerns us to search out the cause or causes of the decay of piety, virtue, and morality among us. Why does iniquity abound? Is it not because the love of many waxes cold? Why does the love of many wax cold? Is it not because the means of grace are not used, or not improved? and divine ordinances are despised and neglected? It is affecting and humiliating to compare our religious state at present, with our religious state fifty years ago, and if we look forward, a more dismaying prospect presents itself to view. There is reason to fear from what is past, that I shall be more and more deficient in preaching, and that you will be more and more deficient in hearing the great and precious truths of the gospel, and that we shall suffer religion to die in our hands, and the blood of souls will be required of us. We are all acting for eternity, and it behoves us by the faithful discharge of duty to prepare to give up our great and last account with joy, and not with grief.

SERMON XLII.

CHRISTIANS OUGHT CONSTANTLY TO REALIZE THEIR INCREASING NEARNESS TO HEAVEN.

"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."—Rom. xiii. 11.

There is an intimate and infallible connection between the first exercise of faith and final salvation. As soon as any person cordially embraces the gospel and becomes united to Christ, he stands entitled to eternal life. So Christ himself declared. "Verily, verily I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Upon this ground true believers are represented as heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ to all the blessings of the heavenly world. Peter, writing to believers in general, says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Though Christians may sometimes fall into spiritual sleep, darkness, and doubt, so that they cannot easily read their title to mansions in the skies; yet when they awake out of sleep, and exercise the spirit of adoption, they find that they are children, and if children, then heirs of a rich and heavenly inheritance. Hence Paul, including himself, exhorts the believers at Rome in the language of the text. "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." The plain meaning of the apostle is,

That it is of high importance, that Christians should live

under a realizing sense of their constantly approaching nearer and nearer to heaven. I shall,

I. Consider what is implied in their living in this manner, and,

II. Illustrate the importance of it.

I. We are to consider what is implied in Christians living under a realizing sense of their continually approaching nearer and nearer to heaven. And,

1. This certainly implies their living under a realizing view of invisible and eternal realities. Heaven is inseparably connected with eternity, and lies in the invisible world. Christians may think of heaven, without the least realizing sense that they are going there. Visible objects obstruct the sight of those that are invisible. It is impossible for believers to realize, that they are going to heaven, without realizing heaven itself. They must exercise that faith, which "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" that faith, which makes future things present, and invisible things visible. They must have, like the primitive Christians, "their conversation in heaven." They must live, as the ancient patriarch did, "who desired a better country, that is, an heavenly:" and who "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." It is one thing to believe, that there is a future state of existence, and another thing, to realize the scenes and objects in that state, and our relation to, and connection with them. Believers must turn off their attention from the scenes and objects of time, and carry their thoughts into eternity, in order to realize heaven, and the holiness and blessedness of it. Nothing but frequent, serious, and delightful meditations on heaven, can give a lively sense of what it is to be there, and uniting with Christ, and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in their holy services and enjoyments. David had such a realizing sense of the holy joy and felicity of heaven, when he said, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." And Paul seems to have had his heart in heaven, when he said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Such views of the invisible and heavenly world those maintain, who live under a realizing sense of continually drawing nearer and nearer to the state of the blessed.

2. For Christians to maintain a realizing sense, that they are constantly approaching nearer and nearer to heaven, implies

that they live in the habitual exercise of those gracious affections to which the promises of salvation are made. The characters of the heirs of heaven are beautifully and justly delineated by Christ himself, in his sermon on the mount. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." All these Christian graces are essentially the same, and consist in the various exercises of that holy love to God and man, which the divine law requires, and which Christ taught as necessary qualifications for heaven. It is only by the exercise of grace, that true believers can know, that they are the children of God, and heirs of eternal life. For they are expressly told, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and that "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Sanctification is the only sure evidence of justification. It is only by the sensible exercise of holy and devout affections, that believers can realize that they are going to heaven, or can sincerely desire to go there. But when they habitually live in the happy exercise of faith and love, and are heartily united to God and Christ, to his friends and cause, then they desire and hope soon to be admitted into the presence of God, and to the enjoyments of his heavenly kingdom. Besides,

3. Believers realize the shortness and rapidity of time, which gives them a realizing sense how fast they are approaching towards heaven. The longest period of time appears very short in the view of eternity. Just so far as Christians realize eternity, their present state dwindles into nothing. It seems to them, that they shall soon, very soon exchange worlds, and reach their long home. While they keep themselves in the love of God, and habitually converse with the objects of eternity, they realize, that their lives are rapidly shortening, and coming to a final and happy close. Job was deeply impressed in view of the rapidity with which the current of time was bearing him on to the ocean of eternity. He says, "My days are vanity; they are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they are swifter than a post, they flee away." Joshua said while in health, "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob habitually felt, that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and constantly drawing nearer and nearer to the heavenly world. Paul solemnly protested, "I die daily." While the eyes and hearts of Christians

are fixed upon heaven, they realize that their salvation is nearer than when they believed. They can bear to contemplate the shortness and rapidity of time, and rejoice in the thought, that the wings of every hour are constantly and swiftly bearing them forward to the world of glory. They realize with pleasure, that as their days are shortening, their redemption is drawing nigh; and as they are passing from stage to stage in life, they are hastening to the end of their journey, and shall soon reach that rest which remaineth for them in the mansions of the blessed. I now proceed,

II. To illustrate the importance of their living in such a manner. The apostle says, "It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." It becomes believers to realize how soon they shall "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls." Such realizing views of heaven are suited to produce very useful and desirable effects on their hearts and lives. For,

1. A realizing sense that they are perpetually approaching nearer and nearer to a holier and better state, tends to wean them from the captivating objects of the present world. The apostle says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Those who understandingly and cordially embrace the gospel, see that glory and blessedness in it, which cures them of the love of the world, and gives them a distaste to the things of earth, to which they had once been supremely attached. Accordingly our Saviour says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." Those who have cordially embraced the gospel and tasted of the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven, and expect soon to come to the full possession of it, are willing to renounce the world and all its objects, as the source of their highest happiness. Their hearts are where their treasure is, that is, in heaven. The apostle, therefore, directs Christians to set their affections on things above, to wean them from things below. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." While Christians are alive to God, they are dead to the world. While they set their affections on things above, they renounce things below. While they view their treasures

in heaven, they set lightly by their treasures on earth. This the apostle says was exemplified by the primitive Christians and ancient patriarchs. To the Hebrews he says, "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves, that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Of Moses he says, "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." The more sensibly and habitually Christians realize, that they daily approach nearer and nearer to heaven, the less and less they love the world and its unsatisfactory enjoyments. On this account, it is highly important, that they should habitually maintain a realizing sense how constantly and rapidly they are approaching to the full enjoyment of all good. This will have a happy and powerful tendency to awaken them from their stupidity, to which they are perpetually prone, by the ensnaring nature of the world, which so often absorbs all their attention and affections.

2. A realizing sense of their continual advances toward heaven, will afford them much support under all the sufferings of this present evil world. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." They have an equal and often a double share of trouble and affliction in their journey through life, which calls for patience, submission, and consolation. And their principal source of consolation is to be derived from a well-grounded hope of future and eternal happiness in heaven. The apostles always directed the followers of Christ to keep their eyes and hearts fixed on their future, happy state, as the most solid ground of hope, peace, and consolation. Paul says, "We are saved by hope," and "If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." And again he says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Peter represents the consoling view of future and eternal felicity in a still brighter light. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." While the primitive Christians kept up a realizing sense of a

future state, and of the glories of heaven, they could sincerely say, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Amidst all the storms and tempests of this stormy and tempestuous world, Christians may enjoy great peace and satisfaction, while they daily realize their accelerating advances towards the haven of perfect rest. Christ said to his disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Such are the consolations of the gospel, which it is highly necessary that Christians should enjoy, and which they cannot enjoy, without a realizing sense that they are going to heaven.

3. Such views of future blessedness give animation, zeal, and courage to Christians to discharge the various and self-denying duties of their public profession. While they maintain a lively sense of future and eternal realities, and feel that they are daily drawing nearer to the world of glory, they never fail of being animated and encouraged to spend the residue of their days in discharging all the duties of life to the glory of God and the good of their fellow-men. When they have near views of eternity, they sincerely desire, that the minds of all around them might be impressed with the same views and feelings. While they view themselves as going to heaven, they desire that others would go with them. Their heart's desire and prayer to God is, that secure and careless sinners might be awakened, converted, and saved. A due sense of eternity never fails of animating believers to run their Christian course, with activity and diligence. Near views of eternal realities inspire them with zeal to discharge the duties which they owe to God, to others, and to themselves. This appears from the conduct of young Christians and dying Christians. When young Christians begin to do their duty, they are active and zealous in doing it; and when aged Christians view themselves as upon the point of death, they generally wake up and are alive and zealous to perform their neglected duties. They feel a peculiar concern for their friends, their families, and for the cause of Christ. Why is there so often an awful chasm between the beginning and end of a Christian life? Is it not owing to Christians living so much without a realizing sense of their constantly drawing nearer and nearer to the kingdom of heaven?

If this be the cause of stupidity, dullness, negligence, and unfaithfulness in Christians, then it is of great importance, that they should live habitually under a realizing sense of their relation to, and connection with the invisible scenes and objects of the invisible world. Such realizing views of invisible and eternal realities, have animated them to duty, and would habitually produce the same desirable effects, if they would maintain their conversation in heaven, and keep their eyes and hearts fixed on divine and invisible objects. It was in the view of the joy set before him, that Christ "went about doing good," "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." And it was owing to the animating prospect of heaven, that the apostles and primitive Christians were so zealous, steadfast, and persevering in duty. The love of Christ and the hope of heaven constrained them to constant activity and fidelity in the performance of the most self-denying services. The same views and feelings will always animate Christians in duty, and make them fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. A realizing sense of eternity will awake them out of sleep, and inspire them with resolution and fortitude, to finish the work, which God has given them to do, and which they have too often neglected. Besides,

4. Their living mindful of their daily advances towards heaven, will have a direct and happy tendency to prepare them to die in peace and joy. Those who live as seeing him who is invisible, and realize that the day of their salvation is continually drawing nearer and nearer, are practically prepared to leave the world in peace, and to make a happy transition out of time into eternity. But those who are in a sleepy and slumbering state, and so absorbed in the cares and concerns of this life as to be insensible how soon time with them may be no longer, are poorly prepared for their great and last change. Those who live awake, and are habitually waiting for their appointed change, can meet death disarmed of its sting, as a welcome messenger to call them out of the field of labor and suffering, to take possession of their promised inheritance. The ancient patriarchs, who lived by faith, and not by sight, had hope and peace in their death, and cheerfully resigned their spirits into the hands of him who gave them. The primitive Christians, who lived in hope, died in hope. "For," they could say, "we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For we walk by faith, not by sight;" and are "willing rather to be absent from

the body, and to be present with the Lord." It was a near and lively view of heaven, that prepared Paul for a joyful and triumphant death. He said, with his eyes open, and looking into eternity, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." These, some may think, are singular instances. They are, indeed, too rare; but let any sincere and enlightened Christian live in nearness to God, and in a lively faith of the promises of the gospel, and there is good ground to believe, that he will die in peace, and be able to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If a lively and habitual sense of nearness to heaven, has such a happy influence on the minds of saints, then we may see why ancient saints so far surpass modern ones, in spiritual and divine attainments. Where can we now find men of so much piety and spirituality, as the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and the primitive Christians were? How much more faith, hope, patience, self-denial, and fidelity in the cause of truth, did they manifest, than Christians have generally done in these latter days. Where can we now find a Moses, or Samuel, a Job or Daniel, a Paul, Peter, James, or John? Why do so few, if any Christians now make such progress in holiness and such preparation for death, as good men formerly did, who enjoyed less light and fewer religious advantages? In the view of this subject we may discover the cause of the difference between former and latter believers, in point of spiritual and divine attainments. Believers of old habitually lived under a realizing sense of being pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and kept their eyes and hearts fixed on that heavenly country and heavenly inheritance, to which they were so joyfully and rapidly going. This made them heavenly minded, and holy in their conversation, and steadfast, immovable, and persevering in the service of God. We have no account of their having more love and zeal, when they first began their religious course, than many young converts now have; but we find they did not sleep, nor slumber as Christians now do. They kept their eyes open to see God in his works, in his word, and in his

providence. They lived as seeing him who is invisible, and kept their hearts and hopes placed on things invisible and eternal, and of course, they lived day by day as dying and accountable creatures, and made continual advances in holiness of heart and life, which prepared them for a peaceful and triumphant death. Where is the sincere Christian, who, if he lived in the fear of the Lord and in the view of heaven, from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, and from year to year, as he lives for some days and for some seasons, would not approach much nearer to saints of old, in his spiritual life and religious attainments, than he has ever yet done? The great leanness and imperfection of Christians at the present day, principally arises from their neglecting to keep themselves in the love of God, and maintaining a realizing sense of their obligations to God and nearness to heaven. They begin to run well, but they soon neglect to watch, and to keep their hearts with all diligence, and fall gradually into spiritual sleep, when all their spiritual enemies get the advantage of them. If this be true, Christians know it to be true; and if they know it to be true, then they know the cause of their spiritual declension from time to time; and when they know the cause of their drowsiness, they know the cure. Let them hear and obey the exhortation of the apostle to those in their situation. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." "It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Let me ask this, that, and the other Christian, Does your salvation appear now so near, as when you first believed? Has not the world come between you and heaven, and caused you to lose sight of heaven? Have you not been asleep? Is it not high time, to awake, and trim your lamps, and prepare for that which is nearer to you now, than it ever was before?

2. If it be so important as we have heard, for Christians to live habitually under a realizing view of their constant and increasing approach to the world of glory; then they ought seriously and constantly to attend upon the means of grace, which God has provided for their spiritual growth in knowledge and holiness. As he employed means for their conversion, so he requires them to use means for their sanctification. The means of God's appointment are directly suited to produce the desired effects upon their hearts and lives, if they only use them properly. The Old Testament saints highly esteemed and wisely improved the means of grace which they enjoyed, by which they attained to high degrees of divine knowledge and

holiness. In perusing the Psalms of David, we see how he and the people of God improved the means of grace to their spiritual comfort and edification. He gave himself to serious meditation on holy and divine subjects. "While he was musing, the fire burned." "His delight was in the law of the Lord; and in his law did he meditate day and night." He gave himself to secret prayer, and called on God morning, noon, and night. He resolved to acknowledge God in all his ways, and to bless the Lord at all times for all his benefits. He walked to the house of God in company with his friends, and wished to dwell in the house of the Lord all his days, that he might behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple. He could say from the heart, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." By attending on such means of grace and in such a manner, the people of God maintained a realizing sense of their probationary state, and lived in a view and preparation for heaven. The same means are still necessary to produce the same holy and happy effects on the hearts and lives of Christians. And they have many of the same, and some better means of living holy and heavenly lives, under the gospel, than were ever enjoyed, under the law. In addition to reading, meditation, and prayer, we enjoy the superior light of the gospel, and the more solemn and instructive ordinances of Christ's appointment. The shadows of the legal dispensation have vanished, and the full blaze of gospel light shines upon us. A future state is more clearly revealed, and life and immortality more fully brought to light. Christ has made ample provision for the instruction and edification of his followers. "He has given some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." To render these means of grace the more effectual and useful, he has appointed a standing memorial of his body and blood, and commanded them to celebrate it from time to time, to keep in remembrance his life, and death, and resurrection, and intercession, and future coming at the last day. If Christians would constantly and devoutly attend upon all these means of grace, they would not slumber, nor sleep, but maintain the same realizing sense of the presence of God, and their nearness to heaven, that the ancient saints and primitive Christians did. But alas! how

many professed and even real Christians not only neglect reading, meditation, and prayer, but neglect the assembling of themselves together in the house of God, and coming to the table of Christ. It is not strange, if such neglecters grow dull, heavy, and drowsy, and lose the bright prospect, and joyful hopes of heaven, which they once had and cherished.

3. If a realizing sense of invisible and eternal realities, has a powerful tendency to awaken, comfort, and animate Christians; then we may learn why they are so much more dull, stupid, and comfortless, at one time, than another. We find this was the case of the most pious men we read of in the Bible. Job had his days of dullness, darkness, and despondency. He said of God, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." David often speaks of himself and of the people of God as involved in spiritual darkness and distress. Saints have always been imperfect in this life, and liable to fall into a state of darkness and dullness. The ten virgins all slumbered and slept for awhile. This is owing to their losing sight of God, of heaven, and of divine objects. It is only in God who is light, that they can see light. If they lose sight of spiritual and divine objects, they must lose spiritual light and peace. But they may lose spiritual light and comfort, without losing their hope of salvation. Job, notwithstanding his darkness and desertion, still maintained his hope and confidence in God, and said, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." And David blamed himself for his despondency, and said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." The further saints get from God, and the more they look into their hearts, and search for comfort there, the more they increase their darkness. They must turn off their attention from themselves, and look to God, the only source of spiritual light and joy. Let them rejoice in the Lord, and their darkness and distress will vanish. Hence says the prophet, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant; that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Real Christians who are in darkness, are always to blame if they either neglect, or refuse to be enlightened and comforted. They may always see light, if they will look where it is, and not where it is not. It is not in themselves, but in

God. The same divine truths and objects, which first gave them light, will always give them light, if they will only view them with a single eye and benevolent heart.

4. It appears from what has been said, that real Christians are always to blame for slumbering and sleeping, and walking in darkness. They wish to make themselves believe, that their losing a realizing sense of God and divine objects, and becoming cold, dull, and stupid, is their calamity, rather than their free, voluntary transgression of the law of love. Job and David both complained, that God hid his face from them, so that they could not see him. They professed to desire to see him, but they could not see him, because he hid himself from them, which was virtually excusing themselves for their darkness and stupidity, and casting the blame of it upon God. How often do Christians now think and speak in the same manner. How ready are they to say they are in darkness, and cannot see light, though they ardently desire it? How ready are they to lament that they have lost sight of God and divine things, and cannot recover it? They go stooping and mourning from day to day, and lamenting that God has forgotten them, that God has forsaken them, that God has hid himself from them, so that they cannot see him. This representation of their case, is both false and criminal. It is false, because God never did, and never can hide himself from them, any more than they can hide themselves from him. God is always to be seen in his works, in his providence, and in his word; and if they do not see him in these manifestations of himself, it is merely because their eye is evil and their heart is wicked. But if this plea for their darkness and stupidity will not answer, they have another. They say, God has withdrawn the awakening, enlightening, and comforting influences of his Spirit from them. Be it so, what then? Does this withdrawment of divine influence, dissolve their obligation to see God, to love God, or to submit to God? If their hearts were not deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, they would not desire, nor dare to make this excuse for their darkness and stupidity. It is precisely the same excuse, which sinners make for not loving God. They say, that they cannot love him, because he has not given them a heart to love him. And these Christians in darkness say, that they cannot see and submit to God in their present state, because he has not sanctified them perfectly, and removed all their native depravity. They deny their obligation to see God, and rejoice in God, when he does not give them the quickening, enlightening, and comforting influences of his Spirit. Their plea, therefore, is altogether criminal, as well as

false. It is casting all the blame of their darkness and stupidity upon God, when it belongs to themselves entirely. They can see and hate the same objects, which they once saw and loved. The complaints and objections of Christians in darkness, or under what they call the hidings of God's face and the withdrawment of his gracious influences, are difficult to remove, and set in a true and clear light. All expositors or casuists that I have seen, take it for granted, that the hidings of God's face and the withdrawal of his gracious influence from real Christians, is a calamity on their part and not their sin. But this is a great and dangerous mistake. The sleep of saints and the sleep of sinners; the darkness of saints and the darkness of sinners; the stupidity of saints and the stupidity of sinners, arises from the same sinful cause, the depravity of the heart, and is equally criminal and inexcusable. Sinners are voluntary in their sleep, and so are saints. Sinners are voluntary in their darkness, and so are saints. Sinners are voluntary in their stupidity, and so are saints. Sinners are voluntary in their inability to see and love God, and so are saints. Sinners have no excuse for their darkness, deadness, and stupidity, and saints have none for theirs. God calls upon sinners to awake from the dead, and condemns them, if they do not awake. "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes." And he equally calls upon saints who are asleep, to awake, and condemns them, if they do not awake. He says to saints in the text, "It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." And again he says, "Let us not sleep as do others." As both saints and sinners are voluntary in going to sleep, so it is equally the duty of both, freely and voluntarily to awake.

5. Does it not appear in the view of this subject, that there is reason to fear, that Christians in this place have fallen into a state of stupor and insensibility, and lost a realizing sense of what they are, and what they ought to be, and of where they are, and where they soon will be? Their salvation is nearer, than when they believed. Their obligations to read, meditate, and to pray, are greater now, than when they believed. Their obligations to attend public worship and divine ordinances are greater now, than when they believed. Their obligations to keep the Sabbath holy and to walk within their houses with a perfect and upright heart are greater now, than when they believed. And their obligations to walk worthy of their high and holy vocation as professors of religion are greater now, than when they believed. But have they not become more stupid, more lax, and more negligent, in their secret, social, and pub-

lic duties, than they were, when they first believed? Do they not mix with the world more than they did, when they first believed? Do they not conform to the customs, manners, and spirit of the world more than they did, when they first believed? Do they not love and pursue worldly objects more than they did, when they first believed? Do they not feel more unconcerned for the souls of men and the cause of Christ, than when they first believed? Are they not asleep, while the enemy is sowing tares? If all these things be true, and Christians must know whether they are true or not, Then,

6. It is high time for Christians to awake out of sleep, and realize their serious relation to and connection with the invisible and eternal world. They stand nearer to death, judgment, and eternity, than when they first believed. Year after year is rolling away, and ushering saints, as well as sinners, into a boundless eternity. One year has just expired, and carried twenty immortal souls into that world, from whence they will never return. They were chiefly elderly persons; the rest were one young man, three children, and two infants. The last year ought to be considered as a year of usual health. What the present year will prove in respect to sickness and death we know not. God has reserved the times and seasons in his own power. We know not what a day, and much less what a year may bring forth. But it is not to be expected, that a less number of deaths will take place here the present year, than the last. But where shall we find twenty Christians standing in the posture of servants waiting for the coming of their Lord? It is time for Christians to awake, and consider where they are and what they are, and to prepare themselves and others for heaven. God has formed them vessels of mercy, to qualify them to be workers together with him in building up his kingdom, and calling in his elect. Christians never had more to do for God and for sinners in this place, than they have at this day of darkness and stupidity. Christians will have a solemn account to give, if they suffer religion to die in their hands; and a much more solemn account to give, if they cause religion to die in their hands. They may suffer it to die by mere neglect, and they may cause it to die by their active example. The absenting from public worship is not a mere sin of omission, but of commission. Those who absent themselves from public worship, are not merely guilty of doing nothing, but of doing something of a very evil nature and tendency. They cast contempt upon that religion, which they profess to believe and love; which has a direct tendency to justify all Sabbath breakers. For if there be nothing in religion, there

can be no harm in neglecting and despising all its sacred duties and ordinances. Christians are entreated to awake, and prepare themselves for eternity, which may be nearer than they are aware. What if one of you should die this year, would you not look back with regret at your neglect of duty? Would you not look forward with a trembling hope? It is to be expected, that more than one will be called away before the close of the year. Let every child of God practically prepare himself to go home to his father's house and leave a testimony of his preparation to others. This subject has nothing to say to sinners, but that they are far from the kingdom of heaven and near to the kingdom of darkness. Their prospects and hopes may soon end in utter darkness and despair.

THE END.

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